

G I B B O N's
A C C O U N T

O F
Christianity considered :

Together with some STRICTURES on

H U M E's D I A L O G U E S

Concerning N A T U R A L R E L I G I O N.

By JOSEPH MILNER, A. M.

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—— *male verum examinat omnis*
Corruptus judex —— H O R.

“ But the LORD of Hosts shall be exalted in judgment,
“ and GOD that is holy shall be sanctified in
“ Righteousness.” ISAIAH v. 16.

Y O R K:

Printed by A. WARD; and sold by G. ROBINSON, in Paternoster-Row, and T. CADELL, in the Strand, London;
J. MERRILL, in Cambridge; J. FLETCHER, in Oxford;
W. TESSEYMAN, in York; T. BROWNE, in Hull; and
J. BINNS, in Leeds. 1781.

[Price THREE SHILLINGS.]



P R E F A C E.

MR. GIBBON, in his vindication of some passages in his history, frankly avows, that fame is the motive of his labours, and the most valuable object of his possessions, or at least of his hopes. He must then feel very sensibly any attempt that is made to rob him, who exposes himself to our mercy, and who confesses that his *life* exists in our *breath*. He may well be allowed in such a case to complain in the language of the idolatrous Micah, *Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more? **

The reader will find the propriety of such a motive examined, on Christian principles, in a more convenient place. At present should Mr. Gibbon take the same method with me that he has done with his other answerers, send for the book as soon as he sees the advertisement, it may not be amiss to assure him, that I have not the least intention to depreciate his

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fame:

* Judges xviii. 24.

fame. His character, as a Scholar and a Gentleman, shall through me stand unfulfilled and unimpeached. It may be said, "Who are you that talk with such an air of generosity? Of what consequence are you in the literary world; or who will be influenced by your opinion of classical characters? Mr. Gibbon stands too high in the Temple of Fame, to be at all endangered by such puny opponents as you." I believe his fame is firmly, and, I seriously add, deservedly established. I may be allowed, however, to declare, that I have no malevolent intention against this great man; and that it is as opposite to my inclination, as it is beyond my ability to injure his character, as a man of exquisite judgment, sound classical erudition, and every quality necessary to form the accomplished Historian. "Why then the following sheets of opposition?" The very little leisure which the laborious employment of teaching a school, and other still more important cares, have left me, I studiously devote to the reading of history. Mr. Gibbon's performance falling in my way, I read it with avidity, delighted as I went along, to find a new light and order given to subjects, which I had read indeed when young, but had never seen

seen arranged with such perspicuity and philosophical precision. In one point of view only, truth and impartiality seemed evidently to be wanting. The reader will be beforehand with me in supposing I mean, whatever has any relation to Christianity. The following sheets, perhaps, may convince him, that it would not be wrong to add, any relation to Christianity, direct or indirect: The sagacious author smells the despised religion at an immense distance, and steadily pursues his game through the most intricate thickets with unwearied assiduity. Not without sincerely compassionating the author's want of taste for that divine religion. I own I felt an indignation of soul to find it so elegantly, and yet so illiberally aspersed. I do not apprehend that he has wilfully misrepresented any tenet or passage, much less that his understanding is too weak to enable him to do justice to Christianity. His character of a Gentleman forbids the first; of a man of sense and a Scholar the second. It is very uncandid and illiberal (though I believe it is often done) to impute that to *design* which arises from *prejudice*. What object will not this last discolour? He who reads Mr. Gibbon, with the least degree of attention, must see that he is strongly

a 2 prejudiced

prejudiced against Christianity. Nor will it appear surprising, that not even his good judgment has secured him from a series of mistakes in every thing relating to this religion, from which, in all other parts of his history, the native force of a sound judgment, operating without controul, has happily secured him.

I thought it necessary, however, to see something of what had been answered to Mr. Gibbon before I ventured, in my zeal for Christianity, to give myself to the public. I read Dr. Watson's Apology and Mr. Gibbon's Vindication. This last gave me so clear an insight into the plan of his other answerers, that I did not trouble myself with reading any of them, persuaded, without depreciating at all their merits, that there was room for an answer on a plan widely different from theirs.

The reader may be convinced of this, if he please to peruse the Contents, in which he will find, unavoidably some, but not many materials, that have been used by other writers on this occasion.

Some

Some facts and characters that, in my judgment, have been mis-stated by the author, shall be examined and set in a true light: This will form Part the First.

The nature of Christianity itself shall be laid open in a Second Part, so far as I can see into it from the Word of God itself. This, tho' most necessary and most important, shall be dispatched with brevity. A multitude of words often darkens that divine subject, and robs it of its brightest ornament, an inimitable simplicity. The use and necessity of both these Parts will more plainly appear in

Part the Third, which will be devoted to the discussion of several interesting subjects, all reducible, however, to one point, *the recommendation* of the Gospel to the attention of the polite and the learned, and the vindication of its doctrines from the subtil aspersions of Mr. Gibbon. I shall have occasion here to step out of my way, and advert a little to another resolute enemy of Christianity. I beg the reader's careful attention to the two first Parts before he meddles with the third, as I trust he may find they mingle their influence upon
this

this last, and give and receive from it both light and strength. The recommendation of real Christianity is indeed the *one* design of this performance; and a very superficial view of the present religious, shall I say? or irreligious state of the genteel and fashionable world, will enable any man to answer the question, *Is there not a cause?* *

* The reader will please to observe, that my remarks are entirely confined to Mr. Gibbon's first volume. The plan was laid, and a considerable progress made, before his other two volumes appeared, which do not indeed, so far as I can judge from a very cursory view of them, contain any thing of such moment with reference to religion, as to call for any particular animadversion.

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ERRATA.

E R R A T A.

Page 16. in the Note. *for* Tertull. Apolog. c. ii. *read* Irenæus,
b. 1. p. 29.

p. 17. l. 2. *for* new accounts, *read* new account.

p. 27. l. 13. *for* no idea of it, *read* no great idea of it.

p. 37. the last line of the Greek quotation, *for* ἀσφαλὸς, *read*
ἀσφαλῶς.

Ibid. *for* εὐθός, *read* εὐθύς.

p. 54. l. 1. *for* have satisfied, *read* hath satisfied.

p. 59. l. 8. *for* wordly, *read* worldly.

p. 63. l. 12. *for* judge, *read* rejudge

p. 68. Note. *for* reveleverat, *read* revelaverat.

p. 72. l. 26. *for* too, *read* two.

p. 75. Note. *for* γαλῶνσας, *read* μαλῶνσας.

p. 135. l. 1. *for* with what, *read* with whatever.

p. 145. l. 7. add a comma after ill desert.

p. 149. l. 19. *for* condescended, *read* condescending.

p. 154. l. 7. *for* charity, *read* chastity.

p. 160. l. 1. *for* I, *read* It.

p. 162. l. 5. *for* found, *read* find.

p. 183. l. 9. *for* infidelity, *read* infidelity.

p. 186. l. 22. *for* wordy, *read* worldly.

p. 190. l. 22. *for* Gopel, *read* Gospel.

p. 199. l. 8. *for* we may remain, *read* we must remain.

p. 200. l. 16. *for* date, *read* data.

Ibid. l. 22. *for* Eve called, *read* we call.

p. *92 l. 25. *for* polite, *read* politic.

p. *98. Note. *for* Catilignian, *read* Catilinarian.

p. *104. l. 2. *for* γῆσα, *read* μῆσα.

Ibid. l. 12. *for* adminster, *read* administer.

G I B B O N ' s

Account of Christianity considered, &c.

PART I. *Facts and Characters.*

SECTION I. *The Jews.*

MR. GIBBON speaking of the Jews observes,
“ The contemporaries of Moses and
“ Joshua had beheld with careless indifference
“ the most amazing miracles. Under the pres-
“ sure of every calamity the belief of those
“ miracles has preserved the Jews of a later
“ period from the universal contagion of ido-
“ latry ; and, in contradiction to every known
“ principle of the human mind, that singular
“ people seems to have yielded a stronger and
“ more ready assent to the traditions of their
“ remote ancestors, than to the evidence of
“ their own senses.” *

Let the reader weigh the tendency of the
passage before us :

——— Crimine ab uno
Disce omnes. ——— VIRG.

A

For

For there is a remarkable uniformity of insinuation, which runs through every thing that affects Christianity in his history. It is incredible that the Jews should act in contradiction to every known principle of the human mind, more so, would he not insinuate? than that all the accounts we have of the miracles of Moses and Joshua should be false. A lover of the human species, who valued their immortal interests, and saw in any degree that *these* depended, or even might depend, on a cordial regard for the oracles of the Old and New Testament, would be extremely careful of saying any thing that might have so much as a remote tendency to lessen that regard. Nothing *but* the most confirmed and the most decisive proof of the falsehood of the Bible, which no Deist ever did or can, in the nature of things, attain, can surely warrant this egregious, and I will add, inhuman trifling with a book, which, for any thing the trifler knows to the contrary, may require the most serious and respectful treatment, on pain of eternal ruin. Either Mr. Gibbon believes the Bible to be God's word, or he does not; or, if he pleases to have it so, he is in doubt. Under none of these suppositions can his conduct be justified. As to the first case, words are superfluous; The second would ask

a more manly and a more open way of opposition; even the impious honesty of Lord Bolingbroke, horrible as it is, is less offensive to a lover of plain dealing than the sly, insinuating, artful mode of Mr. Gibbon. As a Gentleman, he must scorn it in common life: and the thing itself is so reprehensible, that I do not see any way but to deny the charge itself, is left for him, in order to attempt a vindication of his character in this point. And here I can only appeal to every unprejudiced reader, whether in his two last chapters he does not constantly practice the very contrary of that with which he charges Eusebius, suppress what would tend to the honour of the Gospel, and enlarge on whatever would disgrace it. You see not in his account of the primitive Christians the sincerity, the charity, the good qualities of all sorts, with which the universal voice of all ancient writers, who knew what they were, adorns them. But their faults, their imprudence, their inhumanity is enlarged on. And if you look at their persecutors, the lion is turned into a lamb; their ferocity is evaporated through the emollient power of his smooth diction, and he has a world of excuses for whatever he cannot still defend in them; yet he talks at times with a sort of respect for Revelation and for

Saints : But, surely, here is a flagrant abuse of the gift of speech. Men of honest minds would be content with less elegance, if they were favoured with more frankness of language. In a word, if he disbelieves the Bible altogether, he ought never to have spoken of it at all, as a Divine Revelation. And in the third case, a state of doubt would have restrained a mind seasoned with any devout regard to the Almighty, from writing any thing to the discredit of the Gospel. For one thing is clear, amidst all the mazes of his pen, that he cordially hates Christianity. It is not so easy a thing, even for Mr. Gibbon, to disguise his heart. Who suspects, when he is praising Antoninus, or Tacitus, his real esteem of the men ? who can help suspecting his sincerity, even when he does bestow some encomiums on Christian persons and subjects ? If then his guarded manner of speaking would not allow one to call him a Deist, this at least must be said, the whole of what he writes on religion has a Deistical tendency. But —

We are called on to account for this phenomenon, the remarkable propensity of the Jews to idolatry before the Babylonish captivity, during the ages of miracles, and their exemption
from

from it in after-ages to this day, so long after miracles have ceased. I own the case is remarkable; it has cost me serious thought, before I saw Mr. Gibbon's remark upon it, which whether it was copied from Lord Bolingbroke I must not presume to say. But he has observed the same thing, and glories in the inefficacy of all the Mosaic miracles. We may justly observe, with Dr. Watson, that the Jews did not behold these miracles with careless indifference; with Dr. Warburton, that in all their idolatries they never avowedly gave up the God of their Fathers; with the common stream of Christian Divines, that the seventy years captivity of Babylon had a great effect in curing their idolatrous propensities. But though all this may alleviate, it does not seem entirely to remove the difficulty. Even if we could not do it, I see no reason to argue from thence against the truth of the Scriptures. The rational belief of their truth, surely, does not oblige us to be able to account for all the ways of Providence. It is a satisfaction, however, to gain an insight into an affair of this nature, where we can. The following train of thought has satisfied my own mind on the point, whether it may that of the reader, he must determine for himself.

We

We first find the Jews as a nation in Egypt. They there so deeply imbibed the spirit of idolatry, as not easily to part with it; and that the impression of miracles was transient, while that of old habits was permanent, will give no surprise to those who know human nature in general, and the excessive idolatry of Egypt in particular. Their mixture with heathen nations after their conquest of the land of Canaan, and the constant view of idolatrous objects all around, so similar to those which had overcome them in Egypt, and so apt to revive the force of old temptations, these things, joined to the common principles of human depravity, will account for the continuance of their idolatry, from age to age, though frequently favoured with miracles, and scarce ever totally deprived of them till the Babylonish captivity. When we come to Ezra's age, we find a generation of a stamp almost entirely different from any preceding one *. I say almost entirely, because I am aware of the distinguished godliness of Joshua's generation. Perhaps, however, an attentive observation of the character given of them in Ezekiel xx. 21, may lessen, if not destroy,

* Should I be asked to account for this, I must desire the reader to consult Jerem. xxiv. 7. there the piety of Ezra's age is foretold, and also the influence by which it was effected.

stroy, the idea of their excellent qualities. Be that as it may, a religious education with which Ezra's pious age (so pious universally as to break the most endearing connections for the honour of Jehovah *) would favour posterity, must have had large and lasting influence, as it always has, unless impeded by untoward adventitious circumstances, such as great prosperity, and a bad neighbourhood, both of which would unite their malignant influence to prevent any similar good effect from religious education in the days of Joshua. But in Ezra's days the people are poor, despised, persecuted, oppressed. They are no more the haughty victors of Canaan, but the humble vassals of a Persian despot; and though, by his favour, restored to their own land after a seventy-years exile, yet burdened with taxes, and depressed with servitude. Add to this, their exemption from the objects of idolatrous temptation, which, in the early days of their Theocracy, before the Canaanites and Canaanitish abominations were destroyed, must have been very common in the land. The state of the Puritans in Charles the Second's time was in some respects not much unlike their own; and the effects of education, we may well conceive, would be much the same.

We

* Ezra, the end.

We know the effects of the latter case, a tenacious aversion to Popery, or to whatever they please to call so. This aversion has not ceased; it has continued, and is likely still to continue, though it has not kept many of them from evils to the full as opposite to the spirit of their religious ancestors. Socinianism much abounds at this day among the descendants of the Puritans. But their education had not so strong a guard against that, nor did the circumstances of the times require it, as against Popery. Perhaps it will not now be wondered at, if the salutary effect of religious education, of humbling adversity, and other favourable circumstances conjoined, be placed in review, that the Jews after Ezra's time should be far less addicted to idolatry than in any former period of their history.

Yet we find them verging to idolatry again in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes. The particular wickedness of some venal priests, and the influence of Greek connections account for it. Antiochus, however, took an effectual method to cure them, the *argumentum baculinum* of persecution. It succeeded, and scarce a vestige of Jewish idolatry can since be found. This was the first instance of national persecution for

for religion they ever underwent*. For Nebuchadnezzar and other conquerors disturbed them not on account of religious principles. This had the same effect as Mary's argument of the same nature had in England. The sanguinary proceedings of two or three years have prevailed in both cases to this day, to impress a most cordial hatred against the persecuting religion. If idolaters persecute, the Jew, though still deplorably enslaved to every other vice, will give up his idolatrous propensity; and in consequence of Mary's persecution, Popery will ever be hated by Englishmen, even by those who are void of principle or conscience; and our Legislators are, perhaps, now more sensibly convinced, by the ferment which their late indulgences to Papists occasioned, that the effect of aversion, once roused by persecution, bids fair to endure till time shall be no more. Thus, from the joint influence of adverse circumstances, of religious education, and, above all, the aversion to persecution, principles each of steady influence on the human mind, the matter of fact of this section is, I think, accounted for, and in this view there is not any contradiction, but

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rather

* For some individuals had been persecuted, as appears from the book of Daniel.

rather a conformity to every known principle of the human mind in the conduct of the Jews.

SECTION II.

Judaizing Christians.

THIS article is not of much importance, nor will it detain us long : only it will shew, in a strong light, what is my professed design to shew, that the Author misrepresents whatever affects Christianity. “ It became matter of
 “ doubt and controversy, whether a man, who
 “ sincerely acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah,
 “ but who still continued to observe the law
 “ of Moses, could possibly hope for salvation.
 “ The humane temper of Justin Martyr inclined him to answer this question in the affirmative ; and though he expressed himself
 “ with the most guarded diffidence, he ventured
 “ to determine in favour of such an imperfect
 “ Christian, if he were content to practise the
 “ mosaic ceremonies, without pretending to
 “ assert their general use or necessity. But
 “ when Justin was pressed to declare *the sentiments of the church*, he confessed that *there were very many* among the Orthodox Christians, who not only excluded their Judaizing
 “ Brethren’

“Brethren from the hope of salvation, but
 “who declined any intercourse with them in
 “the common offices of friendship, hospitality,
 “and social life*.” The reader very easily sees
 that this is a very heavy charge against the
 Christians, very early Christians too, who are
 supposed to have imbibed the Gospel in its
 purity, as men of an inhuman and intolerant
 spirit. His candour will help him to see also,
 that if the inhumanity he complains of was far
 from being general among them, the censure
 ought to be confined to those who deserve it,
 and not to affect the whole body, or their re-
 ligion in general. Now this happens to be the
 very case. Let the learned reader consult Jus-
 tin’s dialogue against Trypho, page 62 of the
 folio edition, and there he may find the pas-
 sage alluded to. The expression is, Εἰς οὖν οἱ
 λεγόντες. What Greek criticism taught Mr.
 Gibbon to translate this, *there were very many*
who said so? There *were some*, Justin confesses:
 nor does he speak a word that I can find re-
 lating to the sentiment of the Church. If even
 Justin be still thought intolerant for excluding
 from salvation those who pressed the necessity
 of Judaism on Gentiles, he has the honour of
 following the doctrine of the Apostle Paul, as

B 2

the

the whole epistle to the Galatians evinces. And its reasonableness appears from hence, that though Judaism, as such, be harmless, in itself, yet such a conduct with respect to it is an infallible evidence of a spirit and temper totally incompatible with the Gospel, as will appear when we come to speak of the method of justification.

SECTION III.

Hereticks.

MR. GIBBON observes, " That the Apostles " gifts of Christianity betrayed the " common cause of religion to gratify their " devout hatred † to the domestic enemies of " the Church, charging on Hereticks the same " bloody sacrifices, and the same incestuous " festivals, which were falsely ascribed to the " orthodox believers. A pagan magistrate, " who possessed neither leisure nor abilities " to

† It would ask a greater degree of logical skill than even Mr. Gibbon is possessed of, to define what is meant by a *devout hatred*. I suppose it is a random shot against piety and the spirit of prayer, and arises from an absurd and confused notion, too commonly cherished in this frivolous and prayerless age, that malice and devotion go hand in hand, as if our duty could not be intensely discharged toward God, without infringing our duty to our neighbour.

“to discern the almost imperceptible line
 “which divides the orthodox faith from he-
 “retical pravity, might easily have imagined,
 “that their mutual animosity had extorted the
 “discovery of their common guilt*.”

I make no doubt but the enmity and prejudice of the Pagans would incline them to confound in one common mass the Christians and all the various sects of Hereticks, who, more or less, made profession of the Christian name. Such a confusion would evidently tend to weaken the evidences, and disgrace the profession of the Gospel. Our author, actuated by the same spirit, naturally falls into the same train of thinking. But it belongs to those who understand real Christianity, and are actuated by a just zeal for its purity, to judge what is prudent to be done in this case, and not to those who do not understand what it is. These, like superficial observers, will ever confound and blend together, what those will think it their duty to separate and distinguish. To do the first requires only a malevolent temper, and very little understanding of the subject in question: to do the second, would ask a competent degree of skill, and an

an heart-felt sense of the importance of the subject. Admit that there is a line of distinction, though to careless eyes imperceptible, yet, to thoughtful and serious minds, discovering itself to be marked with the boldest and the most decisive precision between primitive Christianity and all heresies whatever; admit this, I say, for the present, which I hope to prove and illustrate unanswerably in the course of this work*, and the prudence of distinguishing where Heathens and superficial Christians would confound, appears at first sight. If it be matter of fact, that the Gnostics and other Hereticks were monsters of wickedness, error, and absurdity; and so far from being governed by the precepts of Christianity, as our author affirms, had radically nothing that belongs to it, was it not fitting that the first Christians, who (Pliny himself being witness) were respectable for virtue and probity, should shew themselves to be a people essentially distinct from them? Did not charity to the souls of others, as well as justice to their own characters, require that the jewel they embraced should be exhibited clean and bright, and no more polluted with the filth and mire of heresy? If their regard to the good of souls would

* See parts second and third.

would prompt them to recommend the real Gospel to others, must they not necessarily act in this manner? Thus we find St. John does: *they went out from us, but they were not of us; but they went out from us, that they might be made manifest, that they were not all of us.* Thus St. Peter, knowing that the way of truth was evil spoken of through their evil conduct, exposes, with what our author calls great imprudence, their extreme flagitiousness in the second chapter of his second epistle. So all the Apostles were directed to act. And when heretical sects began to abound, God in his providence raised up a great and good man, Irenæus, who, with careful precision and extensive knowledge of the subject, should lay open the various deceptions of heresy, and distinguish the Gospel from them all. His charge against the Hereticks, not only of error and absurdity, but also of extreme flagitiousness and vice, is strong, decisive, and bold. He points out evident facts*: What has Mr.

Gibbon

* Et quidam quidem ex ipsis clam eas mulieres quæ discunt ab eis doctrinam hanc corrumpunt; quemadmodum multæ sæpe ab iis suæ post conversæ mulieres ad ecclesiam dei cum reliquo errore & hoc confessæ sunt. Alii verò & manifestè, ne quidem erubescerent quascumque adamaverint mulieres, has a viris suis abstrahentes, suas nuptas fecerunt. Alii verò valdè modestè initio, quasi cum sororibus fingentes habitare, procedente tempore

Gibbon to alledge against his testimony ? what to shew of a similar kind among the Christians ? If his fancy is to stand for evidence, then

—— non est quòd multa loquamur,

Nil intra est oleam, nil extra est in nuce duri.

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'Tis evident that the Christians did no more in this case than any society of men would naturally do in like case for their own vindication; and if pagan magistrates had paid so much regard to justice and truth, as to have examined into the nature and fruits of genuine Christianity, the line of distinction would have appeared with the most glaring evidence. I cannot dismiss this subject without taking notice of Mr. Gibbon's inconsistency in praising Mosheim's account of the Gnostics as ingenious and candid, and at the same time paying so little regard to it in his own account of them. If he had considered his description of Carpocrates's monstrous and flagitious heresy, he surely would not have said, that the Hereticks were governed by the precepts of Christianity.

SECTION

tempore manifestati sunt, graviora forore a fratre facta, & alia multa odiosa & irreligiosa facientes. *These are strong charges, and require something more than our author's imagination to answer them.*

TERTULL. Apolog. c. ii. p. 29. Paris folio edition.

SECTION IV.

New accounts of the Gnostics.

THUS Mr. Gibbon observes of them*.
 “The Mosaic account of the creation and
 “fall of man was treated with profane derision”
 (is this word *profane* in jest or in earnest? Why
 does he deal in such ambiguous modes of
 speech? why abuse the gift of language, whose
 principle end is, to lay open, not to disguise,
 the sentiments of the soul?) “by the Gnostics,
 “who would not listen with patience to the re-
 “pose of the deity after six days labour, to the
 “rib of Adam, the garden of Eden, the trees
 “of life and knowledge, the speaking serpent,
 “the forbidden fruit, and the eternal condem-
 “nation pronounced against human kind for
 “the venial offence of their first progenitors.”
 And more to this purpose he puts into the
 mouths of the Gnostics against Jehovah, with
 respect to his grant of the land of Canaan to
 the descendants of Abraham, and the charac-
 ter and conduct of that people. Though there
 is some truth couched under this account, yet
 the whole is so far from being a true account
 of the Gnostics, that I may well call it a *new*
 one. To justify this assertion, I would desire

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any of Mr. Gibbon's readers, who has not been versed in ecclesiastical history, to examine the effect which the whole passage concerning the Gnostics has on his mind. Is it not this, to lead him to the idea, that these Hereticks did not believe there was any truth in the Mosaic history? It is fitting that they should be told that this was by no means the case. The Gnostics did believe these facts; and Mosheim, whose account of the Gnostics he calls ingenious and candid, would have shewn our author, particularly concerning the serpent, that they lavished their encomiums on the serpent, so far were they from not listening with patience to the speaking serpent. Not that it is of any material consequence what so absurd and impious a sect believed or disbelieved; but he who undertakes to give us historical views of things, should give us faithful, not ensnaring ones. Irenæus's 34th C. B. 1. may convince any man, that the Gnostics did not disbelieve the matters of fact relating to paradise, to Noah's Ark, to the most early periods of Jewish history. Divided as they were into many parties, which disturbed and disgraced the church of Christ in the first, second, and third centuries, they pretty generally agreed in the ideas of two opposite principles ruling the universe,

universe, and in supposing that the evil principle, or at least some third principle, which was far from being of a beneficent nature, was the creator of the world, and the law-giver of Israel. Under his auspices they supposed all the miraculous events of Jewish story to have been conducted. These were their ideas, not less impious it may be than those which Mr. Gibbon ascribes to them, but also so absurd and nonsensical, that had they been produced in their real colours, by a fair quotation from Irenæus, with which there is no necessity to decorate my page, they would not have served his purpose, which doubtless was to asperse the word of God by the help of some convenient vehicle. He takes care also to inform us, that they were "the most polite, the most learned, and the most wealthy of the Christian name." I know no evidence of this, nor does he favour us with any. Bardesanes and Tatian were indeed men of genius; but neither the ideas, nor the practice of these Hereticks in general favour this notion. It is not the Gnostics, but Lord Bolingbroke, who sits for his picture in this vehement satire on the Old Testament. I remember to have seen similar expressions in the writings of that haughty infidel. The genius of ancient is

very different from that of modern infidelity. The former was timid, hardly plausible in its reasonings, wholly absurd, and covered with superstition as bigoted and as violent as any which it affects to deride. The same Tacitus, who can deride the superstition of the Christians, can gravely tell a superstitious story himself with all the marks of the most unmanly credulity. The modern infidelity, having, by the rapid increase of science and of audaciousness, divested itself of all religious fear of every kind, reasonable or superstitious, affects a rationality and a politeness unknown to those ancients. Its character is a fastidious parade of wisdom, and it is perpetually ringing changes on the evils of prompt belief and wild enthusiasm. No wonder so sober and specious an adventurer is ashamed of the alliance of ancient infidelity, and therefore labours to give her a more modern air, and dress her in the fashion, before she introduce her into company.

A writer, with the least regard to the Scriptures, would never have suffered such calumnies to have entered his book without giving something like an antidote to his reader. There are three charges against God Almighty
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in this new account of the Gnostics, injustice to mankind in the fall of Adam; various absurdities and follies in the Jewish ritual, and several circumstances of their history; and injustice to the Canaanites in the grant of their land to Israel. Does Mr. Gibbon, Lord Bolingbroke, or any other objector pretend to know the quantity of evil that is in sin? then they may decide how far the sin of Adam was venial or not. Till then it is a folly past the power of description, to give any opinion concerning it from the stores of our own reason. But it is said, be it ever so heinous, why must we be charged with it? Here again, if we consider that union, which, in scripture, is ever supposed to connect the first parent and the whole human race, it would first be enquired, are you competent to decide upon this union? know you its real nature and its properties? Till you do, there lies not so much as a presumption against the Almighty's dealings that result from it. He must know we do not. However his judgments resulting from it may appear to our reason, her conclusions on the point are of no more real weight in the eye of right reason, than the imaginations of an infant on the construction of a ship can be. The same kind of reason-

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ing is easily applicable to all objections levelled against the Jewish ritual and the whole œconomy of that dispensation. No man without superlative arrogance can pretend to be a judge of all that was fitting for God to enjoin in it. The relations, connections, dependances, and circumstances of the divine counsels may, for any thing we know to the contrary, be infinitely varied, and require even an infinite capacity to comprehend them. No insect skimming on the ocean can be so much at a loss to measure the dimensions of that *capacious bed of waters*, as man must be, when he undertakes, with his scanty line, to fathom infinite wisdom.

It may be said, "at least we are judges of matters of *meum and tuum* : The Israelites had surely no right to dispossess and destroy the proprietors of Canaan." This is no intricate case ; the voice of common sense and common equity determines it at once." In what world do men argue at this rate ? In that which is continually exhibiting proofs of the divine sovereignty. Let only the rights of the universal proprietor be exhibited, and this case, the darling of fastidious infidelity, requires no more. Cannot he who gives with free beneficence, take away without injustice ? Is he
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not continually in the course of his providence acting the same thing? If he command the lightning to deprive this man of life, it is done. If he charge fire and water with the same commission, the obedient elements never fail to execute his decree. May he not charge men with similar orders, and shall they be less faithful than inanimate nature? This is the case: A grant, a charter if you please, is bestowed by the universal proprietor on the Israelites of a certain portion of land. Destruction is appointed against the wicked inhabitants by the sovereign judge. Yet even here an humble acknowledgment of his sovereignty, there is reason to believe, would be the means of avoiding ruin, at least of mitigating the punishment. This was the case in fact of the harlot Rahab. And surely ample proof of his sovereignty was exhibited to the Canaanites, by a series of miracles that render unbelief inexcusable. What is it that men would make of the Almighty? Own only that he is universal proprietor, and though always righteous and equitable, yet in his nature always, and in his dealings very often, incomprehensible; and the very pedestal of this whole gigantic statue of reasoning is thrown out of the world. "Do you then think that
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this proves the Mosaic history to be all true and divine?" I do not: That must rest on its proper proofs and evidences, which are partly external, partly internal. Justice has been done to these by many divines, and surely nothing like an answer has been returned to them. The force of what has been said is to shew, that all objections drawn from the unreasonable nature of Jehovah's dealings, or that would keep out of sight his incomprehensibility and sovereign dominion over the universe, contain not so much as a presumption against the Mosaic history, because they are all founded on our ignorance; and consequently leave the proofs of the scriptures in full possession of every thing to which they are entitled. Our humbler ancestors used to be content with this plain argument drawn from the consideration of ignorance: the disposition of the present age to be dissatisfied with it, indicates that we have lost the idea of the infinite distance between the creator and the creature, lost it in fact, whatever we may pretend to in words, and is surely no proof of our growth in real wisdom.

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SECTION V.

The Revelation of St. John.

MR. GIBBON asserts*, That this Book has very narrowly escaped the proscription of the Church. Thus has his aversion to the word of God inclined him to asperse one of its most valuable parts. And the mischief of these hardy proceedings is, that persons of a sceptical and unscriptural turn of mind, in this indolent age, will readily swallow his declarations with as implicit faith as the most bigoted Papist does the justly exploded decretals of the Roman Hierarchy. In this respect Infidelity and Popery are nearly allied. Laziness effects for that, what superstition does for this. And minds enervated by modern voluptuousness, and tutored by habitual profaneness, are as prone to reverence the dictates of the laborious Mr. Gibbon, as ever the spirits of the ninth and tenth centuries, subdued by papal domination, and darkened by superstition, were to obey the bulls of the pretended successor of St. Peter. Mr. Gibbon has shewn, that there is nothing divine in the book of the Revelation:

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* Gibbon 472, and note 65.

tion : His judgment and learning are decisive. It must be so.

It will be well if the arguments of an obscure person, a professed friend of revealed religion, be thought worthy of the least attention. It should not be dissembled, that Mr. Gibbon has attempted to give some proof of his assertion. But what sort of a proof? He tells us in his vindication*, that the council of Laodicea, (which was held A. D. 360) after enumerating all the books of the Old and New Testament, which should be read in Churches, omit the Apocalypse, and the Apocalypse alone. Let any plain churchman, who knows that this book is not read in the course of lessons in Churches among us, judge of the force of this argument. Does it therefore follow, that the Anglican Church excludes this book from the sacred Canon? Does there not occur a very probable reason for this, the obscurity and mystical nature of the book? Another reason might influence the ancient Churches, which can operate now no more, and that is the danger of affronting the then reigning, but rapidly declining Roman power. The prophecies of this book were even then applied

* Page 42.

applied to the Roman empire, as appears from Irenæus; Book v. *Latini sunt*, says he, *qui nunc regnant*. When one adds to this political reason the abuses made by Cerinthus and judaizing Christians, besides the general reason of obscurity, which we may fairly suppose, must have been the only one that influenced the reformers of the Anglican Church, we shall not be much surpris'd, that the book fell gradually into disrepute in some parts of the Church; and it is even possible, but it cannot be proved, that this same council of Laodicea had no idea of it.

This is not the only instance of a temporary neglect of some parts of the word of God from political or adventitious circumstances. Truth will bear the most open examination: I shall not dissemble another similar fact. The Epistle to the Hebrews was for a time neglected by the Latins, as the Apocalypse was by the Greeks. An absurd interpretation of some passages in it, that seem'd to favour the heresy of Novatian, gave a very probable occasion to this. An instance of a much more modern date may be assign'd. Luther, with imprudent precipitation, reprobated the Epistle of St. James, because it seem'd to him to militate

against the doctrine of justification, which he had learned from St. Paul's Epistles, and defended with such ability and success. That great man lived, however, to repent his rashness, and to retract it, on a nearer and maturer insight into the genius of the Gospel: But had he died before his retraction, in all probability the reputation which he had, and not undeservedly, acquired in the Lutheran Churches, would have sunk the character of the Epistle in question among them, and rendered it, in their eyes at least, of problematical authority.

To some I may seem to have increased rather than lessened the difficulty: But it is fitting that things should be stated with candid frankness as they are. A way is hence laid open for the true solution of the case. What is it to us what writers in the fifth century, or later, think of this or that book of Scripture? The æra is too recent to decide any thing concerning the authenticity of the sacred books. It might previously be expected that the channels of divine truth, however immaculate in their sources, would be discoloured, as they flow through the dregs of time. Must not the various and even endless mistakes and prejudices,

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of which the worst seasons of the Church are full, and from which the best are not exempt; have a natural influence in the production of events like these we are reviewing? Whoever knows the fifth, and I may add the fourth century, will not be surpris'd at these things. But who, except a Sceptic or determined Infidel, would argue thence against the purity of the original sources? These are what they are still; they bring of themselves independent, complete, decisive evidence; what was received by the primitive Christians, that alone must decide this point. In this Jerom is surely right, *Veterum auctoritatem sequentes*.

It is an advantage for the clearing up of a doubtful subject, to strip it of all heterogeneous matter, and exhibit it in that simple point of view, which may be called peculiarly its own. The proper evidence of the Revelation now only remains to be considered; that is partly external, partly internal. A few words will suffice for both.

I. This book then is owned to be of divine authority, and to have been received as such in the Church by Irenæus, whose testimony alone outweighs the whole fourth and fifth century.

century. For this man lived the next age to St. John; he had been the disciple of Polycarp, who, together with the renowned Ignatius, had been the disciple of the beloved Apostle. He was so thoroughly satisfied with its divinity, that he wrote commentaries on the book, as in part we have seen already. The case is now brought to a simple point. Irenæus acquaints us that this book was received into the sacred Canon in his time; there is no more appearance of any dissent in any part of the Church to it, than to any other part of the Scriptures. He treats it as divine himself; he tells us it was written by John the disciple of the Lord, he could not but know from his master Polycarp the truth of what he asserts. We add to him Justin Martyr, who also wrote commentaries on the same book, as Jerom informs us*, Tertullian, Melito of Sardis, Theophilus of Antioch, and Clemens Alexandrinus. All these were of the second century. If you add to these, of the third century Dionysius of Alexandria, the famous Origen, and Cyprian of Carthage; surely the evidence of the universal primitive Church is sufficient to satisfy any reasonable mind.

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* Pool's Synopsis.

II. The internal evidence of this book is peculiarly strong. However *unpromising* the subject be, it is his own unhappy word, I would earnestly wish him not only to read, but to study, not only to meditate as a critic, but as a man desirous of learning his duty in order to do it, Bishop Newton's exposition of this book in the last of his three volumes on the prophecies. There he might learn not only the past accomplishment of the prophecies of the Revelation, but their present accomplishment in the world. In short, to give my opinion also, I know no subject more sublime, more important, more glorious than this of the Revelation. It gives us a regular and consistent scheme of God's administration of the affairs of the world from St. John's time to the end of all things, in which the opposite interests of his kingdom and that of his enemy Satan are each unfolded in the most simple, and yet the most nervous language. The peculiar glory of the true God in foretelling future events, he thus expresses: *Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods* *. *I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient*

* Isaiah xli.

ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure *. Would any one know what is the religion that comes from Jehovah and what is not? Jehovah bids him make use of this test of prophecy. He only who is omnipotent and omniscient can at once predestinate, foretel, and execute in due season his own decrees. This is the peculiar proof of the Divinity of the Scriptures. It shines in various parts of the Old and New Testament, and in the book of Revelation with uncommon lustre. Here we are not called on to weigh abstruse conceptions, and settle metaphysical difficulties; only to exercise our reason upon plain matters of fact, and compare events with prophecies. It is not, surely, beneath the dignity of Mr. Gibbon to use this method of Jehovah's own commendation. What subject more copious, more elevated, more magnificent than such an historic view of the world considered as God's own world, hastening in the course of its events to fulfil the divine decrees, and educating the beauty and glory of the Godhead from the giddy, and apparently fortuitous distractions of human affairs, both civil and ecclesiastical, till we behold in anticipation the mystery

* Isaiah xli.

mystery of God's Providence consummated on the last day in the destruction of all the powers of darkness and iniquity, and in the perfect everlasting establishment of the kingdom of truth and righteousness! Much still remains to be fulfilled of the divine plan: Yet what is fulfilled in fact, is surely as real an earnest of the remainder, as the debtor's past punctuality is of his future payments. Here our author may see Christianity to be divine, and learn the difference between scriptural prophecies, and those oracular ambiguities of polytheism. *Aio te Æacidem Romanos vincere posse*, is an excellent comment on the first passage from Isaiah, just quoted, and the evidence of the divine oracles is as sound and decisive, as that of the Epirot was ambiguous and delusive. At the same time Mr. Gibbon may see an use of his historic knowledge far more noble and liberal than any he has hitherto made of it. To trace the movements of Divine Providence must, surely, be a more grand and useful employment than to examine the springs of human artifice, and investigate all the laborious, but impotent, schemes of sublunary ambition. His historic page, in the subsequent parts of his work, may receive a strength of colouring, and a sublimity of conception even from this

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unpromising subject, while he acquaints his readers, as he goes along, how every thing in the history of the Church, of Mahometanism, of Pagan and Papal Rome, is only fulfilling the decrees of the Almighty exhibited in the Revelation. Should it be said, after all, How can you secure us from being mistaken in the use and application of these things? Every man must do this for himself: The book in question, I mean Bishop Newton's, seems to me to have satisfied this subject; and the additional and concurrent light of the prophet Daniel, and other prophetical parts of Scripture, confirms the argument abundantly. Should any man ask, How do you prove the propositions of Euclid? Would not this be the answer? Consult him, and exercise your own faculties upon his argumentation. The same, with all due allowances for the difference between mathematical and moral subjects, should be done in the case before us. I mention Newton particularly, because he has availed himself of the helps of former writers, and given us a comprehensive scheme of prophecy: But the Church in no age was destitute of this light. The belief of real Christians is not so irrational as Infidels are apt to suppose. While these are towering with uncertain sight on the heights
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of metaphysical speculation to confirm themselves in Infidelity, those are humbly creeping on the *terra firma* of prophetic matter of fact, which lies even with the powers of the human mind, and was given by Jehovah himself as the fairest and most satisfactory proof of his Revelation. Let Infidels answer, if they can, these proofs; let them detect their fallacies, and expose their weakness. Till this be done, Christians have a right to act on what has once been demonstrated. The Newtonian principles of gravitation, and of light and colours, once established by solid proofs, are allowed and taken for granted by all Philosophers. Why the same liberty should not be used with respect to the proofs of Revealed Religion, it behoves the enemies of the Gospel to consider. Hume, with all the positiveness of the most arrogant dogmatist, and in plain contradiction to his own principle of universal scepticism, takes it for granted, that Sir Isaac Newton deserved reproach for applying himself to meditate on the prophecies *. And Mr. Gibbon reprobates any attempt of the same kind on the Apocalypse, as made on an *unpromising subject*. No proof, not a shadow appears of an argument to invalidate what has been demonstrated. Is it in

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* Hume's History of England, Vol. vi. p. 197.

favour of Infidelity alone that, in this reasoning age, irrational disgust must pass for argument, and supercilious contempt for demonstration?

SECTION VI.

Ignatius's Testimony to our Lord's Resurrection.

MR. GIBBON observes, "It was impossible that the Gnostics could receive our present Gospels, many parts of which (particularly the resurrection of Christ) are directly, and as it may seem designedly, pointed against their favourite tenets. It is therefore somewhat singular that Ignatius (*Epist. ad Smyrn.*) should chuse to employ a vague and doubtful tradition, instead of quoting the certain testimony of the Evangelists." *

Mr. Davis had observed, that though he had read over, more than once, the whole Epistle, he could not find any passage that bears the least affinity to what Mr. Gibbon observes. Perhaps the learned reader will not be surpris'd at this, when he sees the passage given us by Mr. Gibbon himself in his vindication,

Gibbon's xv. Chap. 34 note.

cation, attended with his own translation of it.

Εγω γὰρ καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἀναστάσιν ἐν ῤαρχίᾳ αὐτοῦ οἶδα καὶ πιστεύω οὐαὶ καὶ ὅτε πρὸς τὰς περὶ Πέτρον ἦλθεν, εἶπε αὐτοῖς, λαβετε, ψηλαφήσατέ με, καὶ ἰδέτε ὅτι οὐκ εἰμι δαιμονιον ἀσμάλον. Καὶ εὐθὺς αὐτὴν ἠψάντο, καὶ ἐπιστεύσαν. " I have known, and I believe, that after his " resurrection likewise he existed in the flesh : " and when he came to Peter, and to the rest, " he said unto them, take, handle me, and see " that I am not an incorporeal dæmon or spirit. " And they touched him, and believed."

I was inclined at first to think here, that Ignatius meant to inform us, that he himself had seen our Lord after his resurrection. The first member will doubtless bear this sense; and perhaps it was to relieve his mind from some suspicion, that Mr. Gibbon takes care to introduce what is indeed *a vague and doubtful tradition* of the modern Greeks, that Ignatius was the child whom Jesus received into his arms; so that the Bishop of Antioch being scarcely then old enough to remember the resurrection of the Son of God, must have derived his knowledge either, says he, from our present Evangelists, or from some apocryphal Gospel,

Gospel, or from some unwritten tradition. However, as the subsequent members of the passage seem to favour Mr. Gibbon's translation, particularly the expression *αἱολοῖς*, which tacitly at least denies Ignatius's presence at the Divine Saviour's appearance before his disciples, let us see from other possible sources of information, whether Ignatius has made use of a *vague and doubtful tradition*. That source of information which he calls some apocryphal Gospel, we shall be enabled to reject without hesitation on the authority of Irenæus, who, speaking of the Gospels, says, *Neque plura numero quam hæc sunt, neque rursus pauciora* *. The four Gospels which we at present have are all that the Church ever received as canonical.

What is necessary to be said on the other two states of the case, may be briefly dispatched. Ignatius in his journey to Rome, a prisoner, going to be devoured by lions for the faith of Christ, neither was master of books nor of leisure. Who would expect from one in such a situation accurate quotations? Yet if the learned reader compare the original of Luke xxiv. 39. with the passage of Ignatius, he will surely see the sense to be exactly the same.

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* Irenæus, p. 258.

Handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. This Epistle to the Smyrnæans, like the rest, was written on his journey, with a view to guard the faith of Christians against the then favourite heresy, that Christ had not really died on the cross, but a mere phantom seemed to die in his stead. The Smyrnæans would naturally be led to recollect the passage in St. Luke, or other similar passages in the Gospels, from the Martyr's words; so that his design would be as effectually answered, as if he had quoted with precision. But from Ignatius, who had been the disciple of St. John, the declaration, "I know that after his resurrection he was in the flesh," would come with decisive authority. For admit, that he had not seen the Lord himself, he knew what St. John had said on the subject, who had seen him, and received every possible proof of his substantial existence. If Mr. Gibbon pleases to call this the testimony of tradition, he has my leave at least for so doing; though I may, surely, without offence observe, that it is not common to use the word *Tradition* in such a sense. When you say, you received such a thing by tradition, you surely suppose a longer distance; whoever heard of a man's coming to know what time of the day it is by tradition?

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As absurd is it to suppose, according to the usual modes of speech, that Ignatius, who had the intelligence from an Apostle, and probably Apostles, received it by tradition. But I would candidly suppose that Mr. Gibbon has not adverted to this plain and decisive source of Ignatius's information; which, surely, now the reader sees must not be called a tradition at all, much less a vague and doubtful one.

I cannot, however, so easily satisfy myself, that he did not mean to quote the Evangelist Luke. There is a perfect sameness in the ideas, though a great diversity of expression; and he who is acquainted with the simple negligence of Clement, in his manner of quoting, will not be surprised at the inaccuracy of Ignatius, even if we could not account for it in the manner we have done. Those first Fathers secured the sense and spirit of the Scripture, with little regard to mere words. Their minds were at once too simple and too elevated, to descend into the modern arts of verbal criticism.

I have nothing to add to what has been amply shewn by many of the truth of our Lord's resurrection; and the intent of this Section is answered, if it has demonstrated the injustice,
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and even weakness of our author's attempt to rob us of Ignatius's testimony to it.

SECTION VII.

The Infidel's Challenge.

HAVING taken notice of Irenæus's account of the miracles of the second century, Mr. Gibbon observes, "at such a period, when faith could boast of so many wonderful victories over death, it seems difficult to account for the scepticism of those philosophers, who still rejected and derided the doctrine of the resurrection." A very extraordinary method of reasoning truly! The philosophers were unbelievers; therefore Irenæus is a liar. This or nothing is the tendency of Mr. Gibbon's observation. With similar fairness he might argue thus, The Sadducees denied the possibility of any resurrection; therefore Lazarus was not raised from the dead.

Our author however, jealous of the honour of his philosophical friends, and ever studious to support it, though at the expence of Christianity, gives us a story, that shall in

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some measure excuse, if not fully vindicate the reasonableness of scepticism. A noble Grecian had rested on this important ground the whole controversy, "and promised Theophilus, Bishop of Antioch, that if he could be gratified with the sight of a single person who had been actually raised from the dead, he would immediately embrace the Christian religion. It is somewhat remarkable, that the prelate of the first Eastern Church, however anxious for the conversion of his friend, thought proper to decline this fair and reasonable challenge*."

Thus does our author for once forget his usual prudence, and openly espouse the cause of infidelity: For surely this Grecian's challenge ought not to have been called fair and reasonable, but by him, who believes the miracles and other proofs already afforded in favour of Christianity, to have been insufficient for the purpose. This rash assertion of his evidently implies the author's firm persuasion, that neither the miracles of the Divine Saviour, nor of his Apostles, nor all the various and complicated proofs of the Gospel afforded in the first century to mankind, were sufficient

* Page 476.

sufficient to induce a reasonable man's assent to it as a divinely revealed religion, and to overturn any objections that may be made against it. It may not be so agreeable to Mr. Gibbon to be exhibited totally opposite to the scriptures, but it is fitting his less wary readers should know that he is so. "These things are written that ye might believe, that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name*." They are not sufficient to prove that he was the Son of God, replies, in effect, our author with his ancient philosophical friend: I make a fair and reasonable challenge, when I demand that I may see a man raised from the dead. Why is it fair and reasonable? because the proofs already adduced are not sufficient. For if they be, the demand is surely unfair and unreasonable.

Here then we might leave this matter, calling upon our author to prove what, with a superlative, but I believe an inadvertant spirit of dogmatism, he has so roundly asserted. The evidences of Christianity have been stated with superior light and ability: Is it not somewhat singular that Deists should so cautiously avoid

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* St. John's Gospel.

any fair and deliberate attack on those evidences, and yet should assert with so much confidence, that there is nothing in them? But it may be worth our author's while to consider a scene of Evangelical history, in which the meek and holy Jesus is displayed with a simple pathos of expression as affected in a peculiar manner, and to take notice how far he himself is concerned in it. He may one day find himself affected by it to a degree he at present little imagines, unless in good time he understand his own interest better, which it is the fervent wish of the writer of these sheets that he may. * *And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from Heaven, tempting him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given to this generation. And he left them.* Thus he who was the most perfect model of patience and meekness that was ever exhibited on earth, cannot bear the arrogance of those who pour contempt on that profusion of miraculous evidence, which is shed around his divine religion, by asking for more. Surely men do not consider what they are doing when they make such demands. If
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* Mark viii. 11, 12, 13.

one man has a right to make them, all have; and if all make them, and all were complied with, miracles would cease to be miracles; they would be nothing more than the common course of nature.

Besides, it must be fitting that the Almighty should reserve to himself the right of punishing his refractory enemies, after they have refused to yield to the most competent evidences of his truth and majesty, and not oblige himself to give them such invincible evidence, even if the evidence they desire were invincible, as would leave no room for the exercise of a candid and ingenuous temper.

There remains one consideration more, to illustrate the unreasonableness of the challenge before us; and that is, that the primitive Christians never pretended to an independent power of working miracles; No man at all acquainted with primitive Christian history, supposes that the Apostles could work them whenever they pleased, or when called on by others. It was fitting that the Sovereign of the universe should display his sovereignty in this, as in all his other gifts. St. Paul was for some time grieved at the diabolical illusions

sions of the Philippian Pythones, before he had the divine commission to subdue them. And it will scarce be controverted, that while he was struggling for his life amidst the Adriatic waves, he had no more supernatural ability than any of his shipwrecked companions.

Perhaps it may be suggested, if the conversion of Theophilus's friend was really impeded by this inability of the Bishop; is it not a pity that his miraculous powers were so curtailed? We may safely answer: No such salutary event would have happened. Modern Infidels are very free in drawing pictures of mere imagination, little supposing that they themselves would have acted the same parts which they think ancient Infidels could not have acted, had they been really favoured with miraculous evidence. The way to judge in this matter is to see how they behave with respect to evidence already afforded. What probability is there, that the worthless spendthrift, who has squandered his thousands, would enjoy with more prudence and moderation even tens of thousands? For besides the best-attested evidences of miracles, and all that internal light which glows from every page of scripture, is not the sure word of prophecy exposed to the daily

daily observation of Infidels? Has not Jehovah himself appealed to it? Can a more reasonable and a less intricate mode of proof be desired?

Is it not in their power to satisfy themselves, that the prophecies concerning the singular condition of the Jews to this day are daily receiving their completion. How unlikely, that the Gospel should be at the same time so virulently hated, and yet so triumphantly victorious in the world? But both these things were prophecied, and both are taking effect to this day. Are not the Arabs, in their astonishing singularities, constantly fulfilling the prediction in Moses*? Has not Egypt still continued the *basest of kingdoms*, as Ezekiel foretold? Who can give the lie to Obadiah, declaring the utter extinction of the house of Esau? Are not the rocks and fishing nets of old Tyre a standing monument of the truth of Jehovah? Would not a distinct and orderly prophetic narrative of that great theatre of history, Rome, Pagan and Papal, prove an infallible seal to the truth of the Gospel? Infidels previously would say, surely it would: It has been done, and we are told, that one of the

* Gen. xvi. 12.

the most sagacious men that ever breathed, became a fool for even attempting to examine the subject.

There are always methods by which ill-disposed minds may evade conviction. It was a spirit of the same nature that induced the Pharisees to ascribe our Lord's miracles to magick ; Julian the Apostate to undervalue, at the same time that he could not disprove them ; and a modern Infidel to deny them, because he affects to be wiser than the vulgar.

A propensity so unreasonable, working variously indeed in different ages, ever so far affected by the circumstances of the times as to change its complexion with them, but never yielding to plain and sufficient evidence, must have an origin men little suspect, an immense depravity of heart, which no moral proof can overcome. And it is not of Jewish Infidels only that the Saviour may justly say, *If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.*

SECTION

SECTION VIII.

Miracles.

OUR author acquaints us with the difficulty he is under of defining the miraculous period. "Every age, says he, bears testimony to the wonderful events by which it was distinguished, and its testimony appears no less weighty and respectable than that of the preceding generation, till we are insensibly led on to accuse our own inconsistency, if in the eighth or in the twelfth century we deny to the venerable Bede, or to the holy Bernard, the same degree of confidence which, in the second century, we had so liberally granted to Justin or to Irenæus*."

He does not say, totidem verbis, that the testimony of every age appears no less weighty and respectable than that of the apostolic age. But it is evident that he wishes his readers so to understand him, because his manner of representing the affair is as much calculated to lead them into that idea, as if he had expressed it. Let any unprejudiced person examine then the evidence of Lazarus's resurrection, as

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recorded

* Page 477.

recorded with inimitable simplicity of pathos by the Apostle John. Let him weigh the evidence of the miraculous subterraneous fire and earthquake, which attended Julian's attempt to rebuild the temple of Jerusalem, as it has been solidly and triumphantly stated by the late learned and laborious Bishop of Gloucester. I am far from meaning to weigh them in the same scale, or to place them in the same important light. But surely the just evidences of a miraculous interposition, though not in an equal degree, are conspicuous in both. The outward testimony of witnesses competent in number, ability, and veracity, and all the just measures of probability, and the inward testimony of the importance and nature of the event itself, abound with an exuberance of proof in the first case, but are by no means wanting in the second.

Let the unprejudiced examiner now turn his eyes to the opprobrious scene of those lying wonders, which Antichrist so liberally exhibited during the middle ages, yet not without a distinct forewarning from God by his prophecies. Let him apply the allowed rules of inward and outward evidence to all or any of the supposed miraculous events. In the middle

dle of the tenth century behold the haughty, the inhuman Dunstan seizing the Devil by the nose with a pair of red-hot pincers, as he put his head into his cell, being one day more earnest than usual in his temptations*. Those who are conversant in Roman Legends know that this story, however ludicrous and absurd, is no improper sample of them all. Horace's rule,

*Nec Deus interfit, nisi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit*———

is as proper in Divinity, as it is in Poetry. This, with every other mark of evidence, external or internal, is so palpably wanting in such stories, that it would be an egregious insult on my readers' understanding to attempt in form to evince it.

It would ask a long train of reasoning to adjust the evidences of a really miraculous interposition, that are sufficient to produce conviction, and to distinguish them from those that are not so. Mr. Locke's grounds of probability, in the latter part of his essay on the human understanding, throw a sufficient light on the subject; and all the scripture-miracles, as well as many of the more early times, that

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especially

* Hume's History, vol. i. p. 112.

especially which has been hinted at, and which, perhaps, was the last, with which the Church of God has been favoured, might easily be shewn to tally with Mr. Locke's measures of probability. Mr. Hume tells us, indeed, that no evidence can be sufficient to confirm the evidence of miracles, though surely the least careful attention to the natural motions of the human mind, not yet sophisticated by artful reasonings, or clouded by prejudice, in many cases that might be conceived to happen, must invalidate such assertions. It is enough that we have shewn the extreme weakness of our author's artifice in attempting to confound all cases of miracles together. If he meant to do any thing to the purpose in justifying the cause of infidelity, he ought to have demonstrated, that all the miracles, believed by real Christians, were on a par in point of evidence with those of the Roman Hierarchy. Till this be done, the page on which we are animadverting will stand a monument of a jaundiced mind, but will do no honour to the solidity of his judgment. Dr. Watson has shewn him that it is quite natural to suppose, that genuine miracles would be succeeded by spurious ones: So natural indeed is it, that one is no more surpris'd at it, than that adulterated money should

should be made in imitation of genuine ; and the existence of false miracles, had there been no true ones, is almost as difficult to be accounted for as the corruption of the coin would be, if genuine money had not been first produced. That which our author calls "a cold and passive acquiescence," may be easily conceived to be the utmost which men will attain, whose hearts are no way interested in Christianity. The merchant does not, however, reject all money, because much is adulterated. The scales are applied ; and why ? because there is something in money that arrests his attention and engages his affection. And thus will our author act with respect to miracles, whenever the religion, they are meant to support, shall appear in any degree worthy his attention, as a sinner seeking the favour of his Maker,

Certain, however, it is that miracles have long since ceased ; and there seems a plain hint given us that they should do so after a time, in the 13th chapter of St. Paul to the Corinthians, though faith, hope, and charity, the soul of the true Church, should always abide in it. The well-attested evidence of past miracles, joined to the constant and even increasing

creasing evidence of prophecy, have satisfied the minds of thousands, that Christianity is true; and that there is no just reason to apprehend that the continuance of them would have any other effect than to aggravate the guilt of those who persist in unbelief. The gradual cessation, together with the difficulty of determining in some cases no way essential to the Being of Christianity, and the easiness of belief in these things which the minds of the most pious and the most judicious in the early ages would naturally contract, may sufficiently explain the cause, why the earliest Christians expressed not more surprise, when the supernatural operations ceased. Good men needed them not: The power of the Gospel on their own hearts and lives has ever been with them a most satisfying witness. *Tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them which believe not*.*

SECTION

* 1. Cor. xiv. 22.

SECTION IX.

The character of the primitive Christians.

NO man has, perhaps, in our age, or in any age, displayed more artifice and ingenuity than Mr. Gibbon in drawing the characters of the ancient Pagans and Christians. We were wont to look on the former as immersed in folly, ferocity, and superstition: Even their sages and philosophers could never, in the view of men of plain sense and honesty, be excused from the charge of a base insincerity, for their hypocritical compliance with the religious ceremonies of their country. And we have been taught to reverence the latter as lights that shone in a dark world, and as the most amiable exemplars of every thing truly great and good. But the picture is reversed: for seventeen centuries the Church of Christ has laboured, it seems, under a very palpable mistake in a point of all others the easiest and the most susceptible of decisive information, the determination of the moral characters of men, whose actions are well known: and the present age can boast of a teacher who has shewn us that good sense, and every manly virtue adorned the character of Pagans,

Pagans, while that of the Christians was disgraced by the most illiberal and disagreeable qualities.

It is easy for him to deny this. What Mr. Pope calls, to damn with a faint form of praise, was never more skilfully exemplified than by our author. All the poison of satire is thus secured in its effect, and he himself is supplied with a plausible mode of self-defence. No man however, devoid of prejudice, will be affected by the pictures he draws. It were an insult on the reader's understanding, to detain him long in this scene, in which though, as I conceive, our author has been guilty of the most egregious distortions, yet every studious man can and will think for himself from a survey of original evidence. Those who are not studious are desired, perhaps not improperly, to refuse their assent to so partial an evidence as Mr. Gibbon. A remark or two shall be made on three traits of the Christian character, very liberally bestowed on them by our author, with respect to their incapacity for the discharge of civil and military duties, their bigoted and intolerant spirit, and their gloomy austerity.

The

The first of these is represented as treated by their adversaries with sovereign contempt. What is to become of the empire, if all be as pusillanimous as you? They had what our author calls an "indolent, or even criminal disregard to the public welfare." It were to be wished that he had deigned to pay some regard to the sacred monuments of the New Testament in his views of the primitive Christians. He might have there found the first fruits of the Gentiles to have been the family of a Roman Centurion. Had his calling been unlawful, we should naturally have imagined that some account would have been given of his leaving it after his conversion*. But we need not have recourse to conjecture: It is a sacred rule, let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called†. Thus has the divine authority sanctified all the lawful employments of human life, and taught us, that they are so far from being unworthy of a Christian, that it is his duty and his glory to honour God in the useful discharge of them. We find Christians were in Nero's household, and he who pleases may see instances in the Scriptures of their being engaged in the various employments of human life. The pro-

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* Acts x. † 1. Cor. vii. 20.

fession of arms, we may well imagine, would be of all others the most disagreeable to a Christian. It was, however, undoubtedly submitted to, on evident calls of duty : For submission to the magistrate is strongly inculcated in the New Testament, and was practiced by the primitive Christians to a degree which most men in our times would be more disposed to censure than to imitate. Let the monastic Tertullian be heard : Speaking of the number of Christians, he says : “ Vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, *castra ipsa*, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum. Sola vobis relinquimus templa.” I quote not Tertullian to support sentiments, but facts. In these he may be competent to decide, though in those he is one of the last of the fathers, whose judgment I should regard. Though he fell into Montanism only in his latter days, he had always, it is extremely evident, a sour, monastic, unchristian tendency. His publication *de Pallio*, and indeed his cast of thinking in general, mark the meanness of his views of Christianity. What if he and some others encouraged an unsocial disposition ? Is it equitable in our author to ascribe this to Christians in general ? Does not the very testimony of Tertullian himself

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to their practice loudly prove the contrary? Does not a well-known story prove that Christians served in the army of Marcus Antoninus, and should not our author's own account of Dioclesian's court* have shewn him, that Christians were as capable as other men of discharging all the functions of social life? Their moderation surely, in wordly things, would be an advantage to their judgment and their integrity, and the fear and love of God would amply supply that activity, which their want of sublunary zeal might seem to deny them. It may even be demonstrated, that none are so well fitted to discharge all the duties of human life as true Christians.

Their bigoted and intolerant spirit will be canvassed more freely hereafter. Let the reader warily distinguish between the spirit of Christianity, and those abuses and perversions of it which gradually prevailed in after-ages to so enormous a degree, and with which the New Testament and the character of the first Christians is as unconnected as they are with Paganism itself. Even Julian himself can tell us, our author being witness, that Christians exercised liberality to the heathen poor, as well

* Gibbon, p. 564.

as their own. The Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles demonstrate in the fullest manner their generous, disinterested, god-like spirit. What are all the patriotic feelings of old Romans, compared with the glow of affection which burns, for instance, through the Epistle to the Philippians. Our author should have told his readers, in order to do justice to the Christians, that they were the only men in the Roman empire who thought it wrong to persecute or oppress mankind on any account, who really loved their enemies, and returned good for evil. This was their bigotry and intolerance. And as to their monkish austerity, let him, who can, find any traces of it in the Apostles' writings, the original monuments of primitive Christian manners, and which it might seem amazing our author has so little attended to*. If joy in the Holy Ghost be austerity, of that they were full. But the influence of the Divine Spirit never led any to abandon human society. He has, on the contrary, foretold and forewarned us against the monastic spirit.

SECTION

* Acts.

SECTION X.

Cyprian.

NOTHING is more injudicious than to deal out general characters with an indiscriminate hand. This has been done to the Fathers of the Church in former times, in the light of panegyric and encomium. The moderns have seen this folly, but have equalled it by a similar conduct in the other extreme. And now every smatterer in history solicits the praise of liberality of sentiment, by treating their characters in the gross, with fastidious contempt. Our author, who, I really apprehend, is acquainted with their original writings, has yet indulged the fashionable taste most eminently in his strictures on the character of Cyprian.

I have given up Tertullian to his rage of censuring; but Cyprian must be seriously defended. And yet the nature of the thing forbids me to enter into any course of argumentation: All that can be done is to lay before the reader the genuine copy of the impression which original evidence has made on my own mind.

What

What can be the reason of our author's animosity against this African Bishop? Is it that his instinctive hatred against Christianity leads him with blind impetuous ardour to attack one of its most shining ornaments? Or does an *exclusive* zeal for the honour of Pagan virtue dispose him to depreciate that very fortitude and patriotism in a Christian hero, which he admires in a Roman? Or is the cause of the Kingdom of Heaven (for Cyprian must surely be allowed a right to fix his own creed, as much as Scipio or Cæsar) of less importance and less worthy of zeal, than that of the dignity of the Roman State? "He united the arts of the ambitious statesman with the virtues of the Martyr, ruled in the Church with most absolute sway, with equal fury and devotion." Strange, absurd connection! "Sometimes affecting the character of the Jewish Lawgiver, sometimes of a Roman Consul. It was less dangerous to neglect moral duties than the censures of the Bishops. He renounced that worldly greatness which it is probable he would never have attained: But he acquired what is more grateful to the pride of the human heart, an absolute dominion over the consciences and understandings of men. Nor were the dangers he sustained so great as men are ready

ready to undergo in the pursuit of temporal honours."

These are the lights in which the African Prelate appears in Mr. Gibbon; this is that "*holy* Prelate, the ambitious Cyprian."

Is not the reader prepared to hear the recital of a turbulent, intriguing, ostentatious Pontificate, like that of the famous Hildebrand? But matters of fact stand in a strong contrast to these invidious flourishes.

I beg leave to observe here with Dr. Goldsmith, that "it appears now too late to judge the virtues or the vices of men." Attempts have been made to give our Richard the Third a character very different from that which his contemporaries give. The famous Cicero has also been new-modelled by an ingenious pen. Yet men of plain common sense, who are not easily sophisticated by a specious train of reasoning, will doubtless be disposed to give to the first the character of cruelty and hypocrisy; to the second, that of integrity and patriotism, which their contemporaries gave them. Let the same rule be applied to Cyprian: He was, in his own time, the first of characters in the
Christian

Christian world. His piety, judgment, prudence, fortitude, and charity were universally famed. He had given up worldly wealth and honour; how great he might have been we know not. Our author's probabilities will sooner evidence the strength of his prejudice than of his sagacity. He sold his estate for the benefit of the poor; would have acted over again the same liberality, were it not that he avoided the odium of the persecution; was proscribed for the Christian faith, lived in banishment two years: In adversity ever displayed a steady magnanimity; if he had shewn something of the frailty of human nature in his flight, as our author supposes, it would only shew him to have been a man; but this which our author rashly asserts was not the case, as any man may satisfy himself from his letters; and he finished his career at length after a perilous course of ten years labours in his Bishopric of Carthage, by the hand of the executioner. How dangerous his station was all that time, may be determined from this single circumstance, that five Bishops of Rome received the crown of Martyrdom within that period. These were the general outlines of Cyprian's life; and if we add to this the amazing influence that he possessed in the Church,

Church, the whole of which cannot possibly, in his circumstances, be ascribed to any other cause than the universal opinion of his virtue, we may at once see how injurious and rash it is, in a modern to attempt to give a new complexion to a character so strongly marked, and so illustriously distinguished with the general applause of antiquity. Had any attempted to rob his Antonines of their fame, he had surely resented the wrong: And where is the pre-eminence of Pagan discernment above Christian, that the voice of contemporaries shall not determine characters as fully in the latter case as in the former?

Had he voluntarily thrown himself into the arms of his persecutors, he might have been charged with temerity; had he betrayed a reluctance to die, with pusillanimity. His conduct was, like that of every truly wise and good man, regulated by that

—modus in rebus; sunt certi deniq; fines,
Quos ultracitraq; nequit consistere rectum.

HOR.

In his episcopal capacity, though I confess some expressions in his letters may favour of haughtiness, (for I am not writing his panegyric, but his apology) yet these may fairly be
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ascribed to the influence of the episcopal ideas, which even then had begun to exceed the due bounds. His letters lay open the man; vehement, no doubt, zealous, ardent, vigorous, and vigilant; but at the same time desiring no authority of a despotic and arbitrary nature; nothing in the Church will he attempt without the concurrence of the Presbytery. In administration of discipline so judiciously poised between the extremes of severity and remissness, that he was blamed by the bigots of both parties: So very attentive to inculcate moral duties, that he strongly rebukes those who had suffered imprisonment for confessing Christ, on account of immoral conduct. His treatise on patience, and indeed the whole of his writings breathe so warm and tender a spirit of benevolence, such an overflowing liberality of mind, and so exact an attention to all morality, that it requires some degree of candour to believe, what I yet would believe, that our author really thought it was true, that he less regarded moral duties than obedience to the Bishop.

The least real attention to the genius of Cyprian must have convinced him, that he attended to the latter as a thing subordinate to the

the former. I would recommend to him the careful perusal of his letter to Demetrian, and then ask his own heart what sort of a character he must be who wrote it.

He had contentions, 'tis true, and virulent enemies, even in the bowels of the Church. But it were wonderful, if a man, whose life was devoted to the real good of mankind, had not. We may be assured no pains would be wanting to depreciate his virtues. St. Paul himself seems to have found at Corinth the same unworthy treatment, and for similar reasons too, which Cyprian did at Carthage. His severe censures of the faction of Felicissimus ought to be disproved before they be condemned: He charges them with horrid crimes: and would Cyprian lie? What proof can any bring of his want of veracity? I would take his bare word before the oaths of an hundred Roman Patriots.

Had this man, so solidly distinguished by a life of real holiness, been only a Pagan, all praise had been below his virtues: The magick of the Eleusinian mysteries had rendered him uniformly respectable, and the worship of Jupiter had placed him in a station little be-

low Thrasea Pætus himself. Nero, says Tacitus, desired to extirpate virtue itself by his death*; whether our author has not really done so, in the case before us, let the learned reader determine.

SECTION XI.

Tiberius.

A PASSAGE in Tertullian's apology† bears an honourable aspect towards Christianity. That is a sufficient reason with our author to decry and to pervert it.

“ We are required to believe, says he, that
 “ Pontius Pilate informed the Emperor of
 “ the unjust sentence of death which he had
 “ pronounced against an innocent, and as it
 “ appeared, a divine person; and that, without
 “ acquiring the merit, he exposed himself to
 “ the

* Virtutem ipsam excindere concupivit, interfecto Thraseâ Pæto.

† Tiberius ergo, cujus tempore nomen Christianum in seculum introivit, annunciatum sibi ex Syria Palestina, quod illic veritatem illius divinitatis reveleverat, detulit ad senatum cum prærogativa suffragii sui : Senatus, quia non in se probaverat, respuit : Cæsar in sententiâ mansit, comminatus periculum accusatoribus Christianorum. *Tertull. Apol. 50.*

“ the danger of Martyrdom ; that Tyberius,
 “ who avowed his contempt for all religion,
 “ immediately conceived the design of placing
 “ the Jewish Messiah among the Gods of Rome ;
 “ that his servile Senate ventured to disobey
 “ the commands of their master ; that Tibe-
 “ rius, instead of resenting their refusal, con-
 “ tented himself with protecting the Christians
 “ from the severity of the laws, many years
 “ before such laws were enacted, or before the
 “ Church had assumed any distinct name or
 “ existence ; and lastly, that the memory of
 “ this extraordinary transaction was preserved
 “ in the most publick and authentick records,
 “ which escaped the knowledge of the Histo-
 “ rians of Greece and Rome, and were only
 “ visible to the eyes of an African Christian,
 “ who composed his apology one hundred
 “ and sixty years after the death of Tiberius.”

The passage merits a few strictures on ac-
 count of its singular malignity. It puts one in
 mind of Momus's censure of Venus, “ her
 slippers were too noisy.” Can our author se-
 riously believe that Pilate exposed his life to
 any hazard by acquainting Tiberius that he
 had put an innocent person to death in Judea ?
 A subject of the British Empire, however high
 or

or respectable his situation, might expect the most fatal consequences from such a conduct. But neither Rome republican nor Rome imperial ever knew the blessings resulting from an equal administration of justice. It was difficult to bring to capital justice the most flagitious offender, if a Roman citizen, specially a dignified Roman citizen. Cicero is condemned to exile with a colour of legality for the deaths of four or five as execrable conspirators as ever existed. And the infamous Verres, after accumulated murders, retires into banishment. But a mean man, a slave, a foreigner might be dispatched, so to speak, with impunity, in that much envied, but little understood, constitution of Rome. Appius Pulcher starves five Salaminian Senators to death: And the humane Cicero (such the force of habit) is not ashamed of remaining still on civil terms with the murderer. He then who considers the low estimation in which the lives of foreigners were held by these haughty tyrants of mankind, the obscure situation of life in which the Divine Saviour was pleased to exhibit himself in Judea, and the plausible colour which Pilate might put on the affair, by representing the necessity he was under of gratifying the Jews, will conceive that there was not even a distant reason

reason for his fearing the Emperor's resentment. Where jealousy for his personal safety and interest interfered not, all the world knew Tiberius was not a man disposed to punish out of regard to justice.

Our author represents it as an unlikely thing that Tiberius should conceive the design of placing the Messiah among the Gods of Rome, because he avowed his contempt of all religion. Did he so indeed? Little of this appears among the antients: Modern infidelity is more bold and dogmatical: And our author seems to confound the spirit of antient and modern impiety. His favourite Tacitus in one place would inform him of his respectful care of some religious ceremonies in the choice of a Flamen: In another place of the Sybilline oracles; and he thought both these topics worthy the attention of the Senate. His well-known letter to the Senate, which in so lively a manner displays the horrors of an agitated conscience, seems not to agree so well with the idea of an avowed contempt of all religion*. It is as easily conceivable then that this Emperor might propose the worship of the

* I am aware that Suetonius says he was *circa deos negligenter*: But this implies not an avowed contempt of all religion.

the Jewish Messiah, as the two religious propositions that have been hinted at; and as easy to conceive, that he might be no more offended with the negative of the Senate on his motion, than he was with their determination on the first of the cases mentioned by Tacitus, which was surely different from his views*. Tyrants are not always and in all cases tyrannical; there are cases in which they will suffer their slaves to think and act with freedom; and artful courtiers will not want discernment to find what these are. The detail of circumstances alone can direct to a decisive judgment in such matters; and it much offends against the caution and impartiality which the laws of history require to sacrifice to mere prejudice in a case, where this detail of circumstances is utterly unknown.

One might have expected a greater degree of conformity to the times of which he writes, with respect to his judgment of men and things, than our author has shewed. When he speaks of the danger of a Roman Judge, from his superior, for passing an unjust sentence, and mentions a Roman Emperor, who himself is Pontifex Maximus, and whose too immediate predecessors

* Annals, Lib. iv.

predecessors were both worshipped as gods, yet, avowing a contempt for all religion, one fancies it is some mere modern, who knows nothing more distant in history than the present century, and not the judicious and classical Mr. Gibbon, who thus speaks of antient facts in the spirit of the modern way of thinking. But thus it is, that the most exquisite judgment is no relief against the effects of prejudice; and a third instance is visible in this little affair: How does it appear, that the historians of Greece and Rome knew nothing of the transactions in review before us? Might they not know and think them too insignificant to record in their histories? Should not our author have imagined himself to have lived in their times, when Christianity was perfectly frivolous in their eyes, and not in the present, when it is of extreme importance to its friends, as their very hope of immortality; and to its enemies, as the object of their dread and abhorrence? It must, however, seem strange to the reader, that Tiberias should protect the Christians against laws which did not then exist; but it will seem stranger to him to hear, that there is not a word in Tertullian concerning any such laws, though there is concerning the accusers of Christians; and that Tertullian him-

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self,

self, in the very next sentence, asserts that Nero was the first who enacted edicts against the Christians. How could our author talk then of laws in being against Christianity in Tiberius's time on the authority of Tertullian, when the next sentence ought to have shewn him the very contrary?

SECTION XII.

Nero.

IT seemed necessary to take in the views of this and the succeeding Section, in order to lay before the reader the complete evidence of our author's extreme partiality, though he has been amply refuted in what relates to them in Dr. Watson himself, and in the Appendix to his publication. I am unavoidably obliged, therefore, in a few instances, to repeat what has been said already (not I hope without some additional light) in the prosecution of a plan, which the patient and candid reader may by and by observe to open itself, in a manner essentially distinct from any thing that has hitherto been advanced on occasion of our author's history.

His

His last chapter deserves to be called An Apology for the persecutors of Christianity. A reader of plain sense cannot possibly put any other interpretation on all his lucubrations: The fact being neither more nor less than this, that for three hundred years an innocent set of men were exposed to a variety of ill treatment, even to death in its most tremendous forms, for no crime but the profession of the religion of Jesus; and Mr. Gibbon, tho' he professes to be no apologist for persecution, is perpetually exculpating, extenuating, softening the conduct of the persecutors. One cannot help applying here,

Nos nostraque lividus odit. Hor.

The Pagan persecutors had not found in him so warm an Apologist, had not the Christians found in him a determined enemy. Clement* informs us, that St. Paul suffered martyrdom under the Roman princes; and Tertullian† appeals to the Roman records themselves to prove that Nero first raged against the Christians, and that Domitian followed his example; and though succeeding princes mitigated the severity of their sufferings from time to time,

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yet,

* Γαλιθησας επιστων ηςμενων, Epistle to the Corinthians.

† Apology, chap. v.

yet, surely, they continued more or less in a persecuted state till the days of Constantine. What can be said for the persecutors ?

Nero is but another word for all that is execrable and infamous in human nature. Our author is not the first who has praised his conduct. He has the honour of walking in the steps of Cardan. The same man, who maintained that religion was even hurtful to human society, wrote also an encomium on Nero ! and the historian of the Roman empire, who labours to weaken all the evidences of Christianity, and to blacken its brightest characters, attempts to throw some milder shades on the character of the same Nero ! When men have once done violence to reason in refusing her justest evidences in religion, they wander free and dissolute in the regions of paradox, and scorn to think even on indifferent subjects with the bulk of mankind.

He has been shewn from Suetonius that there was nothing in that generosity of Nero towards those who had been distressed by the fire of Rome ; that having thrown open the imperial gardens to the distressed multitude, he “ would not suffer the owners to touch what the flames
had

had spared, and converted all to his own use." Most generous Emperor! "It is evident that the effects, as well as the cause of Nero's persecution, were confined to the walls of Rome." He cannot then get over the stubborn fact, that Nero, with all his *prudence and humanity*, did falsely charge the Christians with the burning of Rome, and persecute them in the most horrible manner on the account. All that can be done, is to lessen in our eyes the odium of the persecution as much as possible. It extended not beyond the walls of Rome. Where is the evidence of this? The hatred of the Jews and Pagans was so strong against the Christians in every place, that we may be assured, on hearing of the Emperor's example, they would commence a grievous persecution through the empire, the effects of which nothing but a positive edict to the contrary could control. We may conclude, therefore, from the nature of things, that the persecution was not confined within the walls of Rome.

But our author is in pain for Tacitus as well as for Nero. From him we have at once the most decisive evidence of Nero's cruelty to the Christians, of their innocence with respect to the crime of which he accused them, and of his

his own prepossession and bigotry in condemning the Christians in the gross, on vulgar reports and prejudices. Tacitus must not remain under the aspersions of a rash and credulous censor. It must not be said, that Tacitus loads the innocent Christians with the horrid and flagitious crimes, of which all in our days, even the most determined Infidels, believe them to have been innocent. What, but a weak partiality for Tacitus and for Paganism, could have induced our author to imagine, that they might be the Galilæans, and not the Christians, who were the objects of Nero's persecution? These were a Jewish party who refused to submit to a taxation from the Roman Emperor, and were indeed men of the most flagitious characters: But except the mere names, they were so totally distinct from Christians, that it must be a mere imagination indeed, to suppose either that Nero, or that Tacitus, or that any one else could ever confound one with the other.

SECTION

SECTION XIII.

Trajan.

MR. GIBBON observes*, “That Tertullian considers this (Trajan’s) rescript as a relaxation of the antient penal laws, *quas Trajanus ex parte frustratus est*; and yet Tertullian, in another part of his Apology, exposes the inconsistency of prohibiting inquiries, and enjoining punishments.” The fact was this: Pliny desires the Emperor’s directions how he should proceed with respect to the Christians; and the sum of the Emperor’s answer is, That he should prohibit all enquiry, and yet that he should punish those who were convicted of the crime of Christianity on the positive evidence of an open accuser. Can a more egregious inconsistency be imagined? Might not Tertullian well ask, if they are innocent, why punish them at all? if guilty, why prohibit enquiry? and yet, with sufficient consistency, Tertullian might urge even this inconsistent relaxation of the persecution in his Apology against the persecutors of his own time.

Mr. Gibbon allows that Pliny gives, in his letter to the Emperor, “in some respects a favourable

* Chap. xxvi.—Note 58.

avourable account of the Christians." It is fitting that the English reader should know what this account is which so fully clears them of the flagitious crimes which were charged upon them by the Pagans, and fixes an indelible infamy on his own bigotry and cruelty in persecuting the most upright and the most innocent of mankind. "They affirmed", says he, (and he evidently acquiesces in the truth of the affirmation, without producing any thing that has the least tendency to invalidate it) "that this was the sum of their fault, or error; "that they used to meet on a stated day before "day-light, and sung together an hymn to "Christ as God; and that they sacramentally "bound themselves not for the perpetration of "any wickedness, but that they would abstain "from theft, robbery, adultery, breach of "fidelity, or denial of any deposit; which being done, it was their custom to depart, and "meet together again at a promiscuous and "harmless meal." *

These were the men against whom penal laws were enacted and enforced with more or less severity, by virtuous as well as vicious Emperors! Our author indeed takes some pains

to

* Epistle xcvi. book x.

to shew from the circumstances of Pliny's ignorance; and desire of the Emperor's directions, that the Christians were not then amenable to the Roman laws: But if this had been the case, why did he receive any information against them at all? It is curious to hear our author declare himself unable to discover any bigotry in his language or proceedings*. No! when he put two Deaconesses to the torture, in order, as he says, to find out the truth, but found in their confession only an excessive and bad superstition, Does not this shew bigotry, or excessive attachment to the religion of the state, productive of the most unreasonable treatment of those who ventured to dissent from his religion? And when he talks of their deserving punishment on account of their obstinacy, is not this bigotry? Or shall that be given up to the merciless rage of unreserved censure in a Papist, which, in a Pagan, must pass for an humane inconsistency, or even the evidence of a moderate and candid temper?

Calvin burnt Servetus as an obstinate Heretick. Some thoughts have already occurred to me, tending, not to justify, but to exte-

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nuate

* Chap. xvi. 56.

nuate his guilt. But I suppress them. Detested be the spirit of persecution, though found in Calvin: Detested be murder and adultery, though found in the man after God's own heart! It is not worth while to trouble the reader with our author's palliatives of the Pagan spirit of persecution. No wickedness ever existed, but an ingenious man might give it some plausible colour; and if sufficient evidence has been given, that Mr. Gibbon deserves the character of a partial writer altogether in whatever relates to the Christians, I have gained my point: Its importance may appear in the latter part of this work. Should he deny the charge, I shall willingly retract it on this condition, that after reading the account of Calvin's behaviour in the affair of Servetus, he will declare himself unable to discover any bigotry in his language or proceedings. I shall then conclude, that he is not influenced by the spirit of prejudice, but by some whimsical train of thought, which is no uncommon attendant of superior genius.

SECTION

SECTION XIV.

The Martyrs and the Persecutors.

A Considerable degree of ingenuity has been employed by our author to lessen the number of those, and the infamy of these*. It answers much the purpose of the enemies of Christ to deal in arguments of this nature. An apology for the persecutors tends indirectly at least to depreciate the character of the Christians; and if men can persuade themselves, that the sufferings of the latter were not extraordinary, they will be little affected with the argument drawn from this consideration in support of those præternatural aids, which at once inspire the sufferers with patience and charity, and indicate the divine nature of the Gospel. It will be proper first to obviate Mr. Gibbon's objections, and then to produce the direct evidence of antiquity.

1. He has great objections to the integrity of Eusebius. He refers us to two passages, l. viii. c. 2. & *de Martyr. Palest.* c. 12. in which " he " has related whatever might redound to the " glory, and has suppressed all that could tend

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" to

* See the four last pages of the history, with notes.

"to the disgrace of religion." An heavy charge! But let the English reader hear him speak for himself. Speaking of Christian Bishops, he says, "It is improper for us to record their mutual dissensions and follies before the persecution: We shall, therefore, relate no more concerning them, than what may suffice to justify the divine vengeance. But what happened in relation to the Bishops of the Churches; the ambitious desires of many; the rash and illegal ordinations, and the schisms even among the confessors themselves; the successive innovations introduced, even in the midst of the calamities caused by the persecutions, and the accumulated mischief consequent on these things; all this I think proper to omit, the relation being, in my judgment, inconvenient, and which I altogether dislike, and am determined to avoid. I suppose it to suit best with the design of an history concerning the Martyrs, to speak, write, and instil into Christian ears, whatever is of importance to, and commendable in our religion, and those passages which are virtuous and praise-worthy."

It is difficult to conceive what fundamental laws of history are violated by this procedure.

Has

Has not every historian a right to chuse his subject? If Eusebius chuses to write only on that part of Christian history which respects their sufferings from the Pagans, and to omit that part which respects their internal divisions, is he partial on this account? Would any man suspect Mr. Gibbon to be an enemy to the prosperity and grandeur of the Roman Empire, because he has chosen to give an history only of its DECLINE? Had he insinuated indeed in any part of his work, that the Roman Empire never was in such a state of prosperity and grandeur as is generally believed, room might be given to suspect him of so absurd and malignant an intention: But his frank confession and description of it in the beginning of this work, precludes such an idea. Let him only measure Eusebius with the same line of equity with which he would chuse to be measured himself. Eusebius tells us, that he thinks it more profitable to dwell on what may properly be called the *external*, rather than the internal history of the Church.

It must be confessed, the former tends more to its glory than the latter. But does he deny any of those circumstances which disgrace the Church? Is not the short description which has
been

been quoted from him a frank confession of them? Has not the enemy of Christianity from thence an opportunity of seeing the vices of professors in the strongest light, tho' its friends know how to separate these vices from the cause of God itself? One circumstance only is necessary to be cleared up. If the internal divisions of the Church produced any civil convulsions or seditions, the relation of them might tend to apologize for the persecutors. This may be imagined indeed; but the loyalty of the Christians is an unquestionable fact: During the first three hundred years no civil revolution ever owed its rise to Christian agency; and therefore no such use can be made of Eusebius's silence,

This great objection against Eusebius's credibility being removed, there remain no suspicious circumstances that affect his character of historical veracity. His relations are minute and circumstantial; opportunities of detection are every where afforded. It had been as easy in effect for the Pagans to expose his falsehoods, if any material ones had been committed, as it would be for Papists to expose the falsehoods of Protestant Historians concerning Mary's persecution in England. Julian,

lian, Libanius, and many others wanted not malevolence to do it; but antiquity is silent on the subject. And Mr. Gibbon expects too much from the credulity of his readers, that the narrative of the parent of Ecclesiastical History must be condemned by wholesale on his *ipse dixit*, though every candid reader will allow some errors. His personal character is a distinct consideration. No one imagines the authenticity of the history of Henry the Seventh to be at all connected with the venality of its noble author. Admitting Eusebius's virtue to have been none of the purest, his literary abilities are very respectable; nor did he want competent means of information; and it is inconceivable that, at this distance of time, his total want of historical veracity should be first discovered.

The reader, it is hoped, will now see reason to believe the accounts of various tortures described by Eusebius to be far from being destitute of truth. They form indeed a ghastly spectacle, to the eternal disgrace of the persecutors. But Mr. Gibbon, still jealous of their honour, is willing to imagine, that if any excruciating tortures were inflicted, it was for want of prudence, or perhaps of decency in
the

the Martyrs. He supports this imagination by the story of Œdesius, who, Eusebius tells us, (and Eusebius's authority is here at least not disputed) struck the Judge, and reviled him with much abuse. He does not tell us from the same writer, that the Judge had delivered women, most eminent for their chastity, to panders *, that they might be defiled with all sorts of obscenity. The provocation was extreme; yet it by no means justified the Martyr's conduct. The arms of Christianity are not *carnal*. Mr. Gibbon's candour, however, would have made some allowances for such a conduct in a Pagan, perhaps have justified it; but Œdesius was a *Christian*. And in general the meekness of Christianity was so strongly exemplified in the conduct of the martyrs, that this remark of the author can prove little else but his own malignity.

“ The confessors, who were condemned to
 “ work in the mines, were permitted, by the
 “ humanity or the negligence of their keepers,
 “ to build chapels, and freely to profess their
 “ religion.” Hence he would infer, that “ the
 “ general treatment of the Christians, who had
 “ been apprehended by the officers of justice,
 “ was,

* Euseb. Martyrs of Palest. c. v.

“ was less intolerable than it is usually imagined
 “ to have been.” The story in Eusebius is
 this * : The persecution had raged seven years;
 it was now in the eighth year gradually abating.
 A number of confessors in the brass-mines of
 Palestine took the opportunity of erecting build-
 ings for the purpose of worship : But the go-
 vernor of the province making a journey thi-
 ther, and being informed of their way of living
 in that place, envied them this small cessation
 of their miseries, and acquainted the Emperor
 of the circumstance. Afterwards the governor
 of the mines came thither, and (too impatient
 it seems to wait for the arrival of the imperial
 orders) dispersed a number of the confessors in
 various places, and gave orders that they should
 be wearied out with various sorts of laborious
 employments ; selecting four of them for mar-
 tyrdom, who were accordingly burnt alive. I
 believe I may now leave this matter to the
 reader’s reflections ; may not I add, to the
 conscience of Mr. Gibbon himself ?

From the pains which the Bishops were
 obliged to take in checking and censuring the
 forward zeal of the Christians, “ who volun-
 tarily threw themselves into the hands of the

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* Martyrs of Palestine, c. xiii.

magistrates," our author would also infer, that their sufferings were not extremely violent. But the learned reader, who has paid any attention to Cyprian's Letters, will see the affair in a very different light. That prudent and magnanimous prelate had much occasion to rebuke the precipitation and rash zeal of his people; their sufferings were great notwithstanding; and to some, perhaps to many tempers, a quiet submission to good discipline and a prudent sobriety of conduct, is more difficult than all the zeal and fortitude of martyrdom.

I should imagine from our author's good sense, which seems never to fail him but on subjects connected with religion, that on second thoughts he will not find himself inclined to lay much weight on his calculation of the number of martyrs during that most violent persecution of ten years. After acquainting us from Eusebius, that Palestine furnished only ninety-two of these martyrs, he says, "Palestine may be considered as the sixteenth part of the Eastern Empire; it is reasonable to believe, that the country which had given birth to Christianity, produced at least the sixteenth part of the martyrs, who suffered death within the dominions of Galerius and Maximin; the whole

whole might consequently amount to about fifteen hundred. Allotting the same proportion to the provinces of Italy, Africa, and perhaps Spain, where, at the end of two or three years, the rigour of the penal laws was either suspended or abolished, the multitude of Christians in the Roman empire, on whom capital punishment was inflicted by a judicial sentence, will be reduced to somewhat less than two thousand persons."

What will obviously overturn this whole calculation, is the anomalous nature of all persecutions. Would any man, who chose to calculate the consumption of martyrs in England in Mary's days, fix on the Bishoprick of Durham as a standard, where the humane Tonstal contributed little or nothing to the carnage? I grant the Bishoprick of London, where Bonner exercised the most savage cruelties, would be as improper a standard on the other side. What is to be done in this case? Were Mr. Gibbon as dispassionate in this case as the great Newton was in his chronological calculations *, he would have at-

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tempted

* See Sir I. Newton's Chronology of antient kingdoms; an admirable system of reasoning, which evinces a cordial belief of Revealed Religion, as divinely inspired, to be very consistent with the exercise of the soundest judgment.

tempted a medium as a standard. The same Eusebius tells us, that in Thebais in Egypt, from ten to a hundred persons had frequently suffered martyrdom in one day. Our author roundly denies the truth of all this. But he who founds his whole calculation on his veracity in one case, ought to have better reasons than the trifling criticisms which he adduces for rejecting it in the other: I shall take it for granted then, that Eusebius deserves in effect equal credit in both instances, especially as he declares himself to have resided in both scenes.

If I have not been able to afford sufficient data for a just calculation, enough has, perhaps, been said to demonstrate, how erroneous is that of our author. After all, the theatre of Thebais, amazingly bloody as it was, was perhaps exceeded by that of Milan, Illyricum, and Nicomedia. It is extremely probable that the residence of the Tyrants would always distinguish itself in carnage. And the reader, who is versed in this part of Roman history, need not be told that Milan was the residence of the ferocious Maximian, that Galerius resided in Illyricum, and that the polite, but unfeeling Dioclesian, and the savage Maximin, resided at Nicomedia.

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2. The reader of plain sense, who is not critically acquainted with historical events, will, perhaps, desire to see the positive and direct evidence of the prodigious number of the sufferers reduced to some order. This may easily be done, though to establish any thing like a precise calculation of their numbers seems impossible.

And *fas est et ab hoste doceri*. In the close of his history our author observes from Grotius, that in the Netherlands alone more than a hundred thousand of the subjects of Charles V. (of Philip II. he should rather have said) suffered by the hands of the executioner. Fra. Paolo reduces them to half the sum. Admitting them to have been at a medium seventy-five thousand, or, even what will be an excess of candour, admitting the calculation of the Papist, and setting aside that of the Protestant, one may ask, is it at all credible, that the number of Martyrs in Dioclesian's persecution should have been no more than two thousand persons, since the rage of persecution was as vehement in one case as in the other? I am aware, that additional political causes operated in the case of the Belgic Martyrs: But with all due allowance for this, a
single

single province cannot be conceived to have produced so many more Martyrs than the whole Roman empire.

But though Dioclesian's persecution is allowed to have been the severest, yet from Nero to Constantine there was a succession of persecutions more or less sanguinary, but on the whole amazingly profuse in blood.

Cyriac of Ancona* was the first antiquary of eminence in Europe, and his collections of inscriptions are of the highest authenticity. This is one which he collected in Spain :

“ To Nero Claudius Cæsar Augustus Pont.
“ Max. For having cleared the province of
“ robbers, and those who taught mankind a
“ new superstition.”

One can scarce help remarking, though it be totally foreign to our present purpose, that as the Master himself was treated, so are his Disciples in this bad world. He was crucified between two robbers, the scorn of men,
and

* See the authenticity of this inscription solidly established by Prof. Bullet, in his history of the establishment of Christianity. I have made use of him in some other instances.

and they are coupled with robbers in the inscription, which celebrates Nero's judicial severities in Spain !——But to return.

It is obvious at first sight, that the persecution must have been very bloody, since the total extinction of the Christian name was evidently aimed at. It would naturally be no less bloody in Italy, probably much more so : And there is no reason to suppose, that Spain, which must have very recently received Christianity, would feel the weight of Nero's rage in a peculiar manner. Greece and Macedon, more antient and far more numerous seminaries of Christianity, would probably feel its force still more severely, especially as Nero himself travelled into Achaia after the commencement of it. On the whole, the number of Nero's Martyrs must have been considerable, and the rashness of our author's assertion*, that his persecution was confined within the walls of Rome, appears with superior evidence.

Dio Cassius assures us, that not only Domitian's relation, Flavius Clemens, but that many others were condemned for the crime of *Atheism and Jewish manners*, by which he undoubtedly

* See Section xii. part i.

doubtedly means Christianity. Mr. Gibbon is pleased to give us an ambiguous alternative, "sentences either of death or of confiscation." But Dio's words are, *Αλλυσε πολλας κατεσφαξεν.* He *slew* many others.

The latter part of Pliny's famous letter to Trajan demonstrates, that that emperor's persecution was very extensive, as any impartial reader may see for himself. And Tertullian's apology would betray a want of common sense, if the persecutions in his time were not amazingly severe. The very terms of reproach affixed to Christians, which allude to the mode of their punishments, demonstrate them to have been sufferers even to a proverb.

Aurelius's spirit of persecution our author himself allows to have been eminently strong.

No Prince favoured them more than Alexander Severus. Yet in his reign the famous Ulpian collected the edicts of the Emperors against the Christians, that the infliction of their punishments might be put under a methodical regulation. If they suffered under such a Prince as Alexander, what must they have endured under the other Emperors?

Philip,

Philip, the Arabian, was as favourable to the Christians as Alexander: Yet even in his time they suffered extremely at Alexandria. Whence it is evident that they were never totally exempt from persecution for the three first centuries; and that those æras of persecution, which are marked in ecclesiastical history, were only so in a more eminent manner. Decius succeeded Philip. That his persecution was extreme, and attended with variety of tortures, is too notorious to need any elaborate confirmation. The same observation may be made of Valerian's persecution.

At Nicomedia, in the beginning of the last and the severest persecution, "the worshippers of God were destroyed by heaps, by sword and by fire. A great company being bound in boats were cast into the sea*." And a little after, the same writer says, "the multitudes of Martyrs in every province cannot be numbered, especially in Africa, Mauritania, Thebais, and Egypt." And speaking of the Christians at Tyre, first exposed to wild beasts, and afterwards dispatched with the sword, he says, with a particular reference

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* Euf. b. vi. c. 41. Idem, b. viii c. vi.

to the first of these scenes, "we ourselves were present at these things*."

However disagreeable to humanity it is to dwell on such scenes of horror; yet, as our author has ridiculed the descriptions of Christian martyrdom, evidently with a view of representing them as fabulous and romantic, and of lessening the prejudice of our minds against Pagans †, the interest of truth seems to require that a small specimen should be laid before the reader. Eusebius has transcribed the account of Phileas the martyr, concerning what happened at Alexandria in his time. It is easy to *imagine* objections against its credibility. But had Mr. Gibbon allowed his fancy the same range of incredulity in civil, as he has done in ecclesiastical history, he had soon exhausted his materials of Roman story ‡. "Free leave was given to any one to injure them; some beat them with clubs, others with rods; some scourged them with thongs of leather, others with ropes; some having their hands behind them, were hung about a wooden engine, " and

* Euseb. b. viii. c. vii.

† The classical reader may perhaps discern a similar artifice of Julius Cæsar, in his famous speech in Sallust's Catilignian war.

‡ Book viii. c. 10.

“ and every limb of their bodies was distended
 “ by certain machines. The torturers rent
 “ their whole bodies with iron nails, which
 “ were applied to their bellies, their legs, and
 “ their cheeks.—Others were bound to pillars,
 “ face to face, their feet being raised above the
 “ ground, that their bonds, being distended by
 “ the weight of their bodies, might be the closer
 “ drawn together; and this they endured al-
 “ most a whole day without intermission.—
 “ No care, says the Governor, ought to be
 “ taken of these Christians; let all treat them
 “ as unworthy the name of men*. Some, af-
 “ ter they had been scourged, lay in the stocks,
 “ both their feet being stretched to the fourth
 “ hole; so that they were obliged to lie with
 “ their bellies upward, unable to stand because
 “ of the wounds caused by the stripes.—
 “ Some expired under their tortures. Others
 “ shut up in prison, ended their lives not long
 “ after. Others having been recovered by
 “ methods taken to heal them, and being re-
 “ duced to the alternative of sacrificing or dy-
 “ ing, cheerfully preferred the latter.” This,
 says Eusebius, is the relation of Phileas the
 Martyr, a little before his death.

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Euse-

* We are made as the filth of the world, and are the off-
 scouring of all things. 1 Cor. iv. 13.

Elsewhere he tells of some† in Mesopotamia hung by the feet with their heads downward over a slow fire; of others at Antioch broiled on gridirons not to death, but with a view of prolonging their torments. In Pontus some had sharp reeds thrust up the fingers of both hands from their nails; others had melted lead poured down their backs; others underwent an ingenuity or obscene torture, the relation of which decency forbids. Wearied at length, and discouraged with the firmness of the Christians, the persecutors contented themselves with plucking out their right eyes, and searing their left legs with hot irons, and then condemning them to the mines.

The humane reader has heard perhaps sufficient: The subject admits of no elegance, no ornament, no pleasing colours; but it is fitting that the reader, who is less versed in this part of history, should see for what sort of men our author has made so anxious an apology: But they were *Pagans*, and the poor sufferers were Christians! The last day will do justice to all characters!

The infernal cruelty of Maximin is allowed, and with his savage deeds the persecution closed.

But it ought not to be forgotten, that the persecution was renewed in the East by Licinius; and therefore ceased not properly till Constantine became sole master of the empire.

The reader has perhaps been beforehand with me in observing, that to confine the account of martyrs to those who died by judicial process, is a very erroneous method. When it is considered that Christians were denied the protection of the law, and that the first object of the persecutors was not their death, but their return to idolatry; it will be evident, that in tumults, exile, poverty, torture, and various other methods, immense numbers must have lost their lives, perhaps far, very far more than of those who died in form by the hand of the executioner. Abundant testimony from Eusebius might be given, were there occasion for it; but Mr. Gibbon, in his calculation, is silent upon this.

I have now only two testimonies to produce, which alone will prove all that an impartial reader would desire. *

1. Two pillars in Spain have these inscriptions:

“ Dioclesian

* See Prof. Bullet, p. 67, 68, 69.

“ Dioclesian Jovian, Maximian Hercules,
“ for having extended the Roman Empire in
“ the East and West, and for having extin-
“ guished the name of Christians, who brought
“ the Republic to ruin.”

“ Dioclesian Cæsar Augustus, for having
“ adopted Galerius in the East; for having
“ every where abolished the superstition of
“ Christ; for having extended the worship of
“ the gods.”

Agreeable to this, a medal of Dioclesian still remaining boasts, that he had abolished the name of Christians, *nomine Christianorum deleto*.

Let any man judge from these arrogant pretensions, how cruel were the persecutors, how bloody, beyond description bloody, the persecution must have been !

2. Libanius, a famous Pagan sophist, commends Julian the Apostate, because he did not follow the cruel methods of his predecessors. The plucking out of eyes, and *rivers of blood*, with strange kind of torments, he who must certainly know, he too who in his heart was as inimical to the Gospel as our author, confesses to have been the appendages of the persecutions

secutions preceding his own times. Was ever sceptical derision more indiscreetly employed than by Mr. Gibbon on this subject?

The deaths of the persecutors must detain us a few moments. "If any still delight, says Mr. Gibbon, in recording the wonderful deaths of the persecutors, I would recommend to their perusal an admirable passage of Grotius concerning the last illness of Philip II. of Spain."

Grotius's history is not accessible to the generality of readers; and as our author has not favoured us with the passage, I must be content to remain deprived of the instruction which it is calculated to convey; and making use of the best lights I have, I shall lay before the reader the account of the deaths of two of the most ferocious of the persecutors, and compare them with some other similar historical events; and then make a remark or two which may seem to arise out of the subject.

The death of Galerius, whose contribution to the sum of martyrs was eminently liberal, is thus described by Eusebius*: "An impost-
hume

* Book viii. c. 16. I might have added Lactantius's testimony also; but have studiously avoided any quotations from this author, because his political views of his own times seem liable to exception, and because Eusebius's ample account needs no help from his abridgment.

hume suddenly seized him about the midst of his privy parts (περι τα γεσα των απορρητων, *consumptis genitalibus defecit*, says Victor) after that an ulcer in the fundament (ελκος εν βαθει); these diseases conjointly corroded his bowels, whence issued an incredible number of worms, and a most noisome stench: Being immensely corpulent; his flesh now in a state of putrefaction, was an horrid spectacle to those who came near him. Some of his physicians lost their lives by the stench; others, because they could administer no remedy, were cruelly put to death. Some degree of humiliation was at length extorted from him; he put a stop to the persecution, and soon after died."

Maximin had equalled, if not exceeded him in cruelty; and his death was distinguished by signatures no less tremendous. *

" Being suddenly struck from heaven with the severest pains, he fell on the ground, and perished through hunger. His flesh being melted away by an invisible fire, he was reduced to a mere skeleton; he was scorched to the very marrow of his bones; his eyes started out of his head. At last acknowledging

* Eusebius, b. ix. c. 10.

“ ledging the justice of his sufferings, on account of his contempt of Christ, he gave up the ghost.”

Scenes not unlike these the reader may meet with in the history of the Maccabees in the Apocrypha. Antiochus Epiphanes was as ingeniously cruel in persecuting the Church of the Old Testament, as these men were in persecuting that of the New; and he died in agonies of torture, perhaps no less extraordinary.

Let the grave Josephus be heard, describing the death of him whom flattery has stiled *the Great*, I mean the first Herod, who persecuted the divine Saviour in his infancy, and massacred the infants at Bethlehem on his account. “ The King’s sickness spread over his body, and his pains were dreadful; he had a strong ague; an intolerable itch over his body; a daily colick; his feet swelled, as though he had a dropsy; his privy members were putrified; worms bred in the putrified parts; he had a grievous asthma; his whole body was convulsed; he would have killed himself, but was prevented.” In these complicated tortures died this sanguinary tyrant.

The twelfth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles gives us an account of the extraordinary death of another Herod, a cruel persecutor of the Christians. The reader may find in Josephus an account of his death extremely similar; it belonged to divine inspiration to add, "The Angel of the Lord smote him."

Modern times have not seen a more cruel persecutor of the Gospel than Philip II. of Spain. But mark his end: "For two-and-twenty days together there was a flux of blood from all the vessels of his body; and a little before his death, imposthumes that broke in his breast, from which there continually issued so great a swarm of vermin, that all the care of his attendants could not destroy them." * *morbus pediculosus*

The emotions of that awful principle *Conscience*, would, I believe, in every man, whom proud reasonings have not perverted, naturally point out, *this is the finger of God*. Justly are they tormented, who delighted to torment the innocent. It seems an high offence against natural religion as well as revealed, not to see, and confess, and adore the Divine interposition in these

* Sully's Memoirs, vol. ii. b. x. p. 251.

these things. Neither is there a more natural notion of God Almighty than this, that he peculiarly delights to avenge the cause of the needy and the miserable against the oppression of the proud and the mighty. It is what one eminently expects from the Sovereign of the earth; and the Scriptures every where abundantly confirm this idea.

Modern Sceptics pay then no great compliment to their own wisdom, in treating with contempt these sentiments, from which no barbarous age was ever totally exempt. Great caution, it must be allowed, ought ever to be used in applying them to particular cases; but not such a caution as excludes all piety, and leads us into mere Epicureanism.

Our author, in perfect consistence with himself, still deals softly with Galerius, pities his sufferings, and blames the Christians for insulting him. But where is his pity for the poor suffering Christians?

Indeed humanity will commiserate the distressed, whether deservedly so or not. But in the first case, pity is mixed with indignation at their crimes, and an approbation of the justice

which inflicts the sufferings: In the latter it is a simple emotion of the mind, and indulges itself without mixture. This distinction is justly applicable to the case before us; and it needs no great discernment to know what estimate ought to be formed of Mr. Gibbon's compassion for Galerius, since it would raise itself on the ruin of all piety.

Thus have I, in various instances, examined the impartiality of our author in every thing relating to Christianity. And it is only in reference to that most important object, that I would hold him out as the very contrast of his favourite Tacitus, at least of what he professes to be in the beginning of his annals, *sine ira & studio, quorum causas procul habeo.*

P A R T II.

Evangelical Truth.

THE search of truth has ever been looked on as the best employment of the human mind ; it is that which philosophy has ever made her object real or pretended ; and though the various systems, which have prevailed in the world, have, for the most part, lived only to succeed one another, yet truth was what each professed to investigate and revere.

But as all truths are not equally useful or necessary, the limited powers of man, during the short space of his existence on earth, ought certainly to be most employed on those which are most valuable. His sphere is narrow and confined ; it is then one of the most momentous points of wisdom, for him to know how to move in it with the greatest advantage to others and to himself : An excessive pursuit of trifling knowledge, though attended with the acquisition of real truth, being, perhaps, eventually as hurtful to himself, as lazy apathy, or the walk of error.

Those truths which relate to the knowledge and worship of God, and the way of securing his favour, must be more important than any other, in the same proportion as the substance * is more valuable than the shadow, as eternity is of more consequence than time.

These truths are contained in the Bible ; and therefore the study of this book is more useful than of all other books and sciences put together. But here again, the idea of utility must modify the whole ; If the great end of this book be not kept in view, a student may be as insignificantly employed in it, as many laborious pedants have been in settling the various readings of the ancient classics. All who have any idea of the genius of Christianity, will allow me to call whatever relates to the knowledge and worship of God, and the way of securing his favour, by the name of EVANGELICAL TRUTH. There are many truths of the Scripture, of which we may be safely ignorant ; though the study of these also has its advantages, and deserves commendation, provided that the main end be kept in view, and
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* Proverbs viii. 21. *That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance.* As if every thing in comparison of divine wisdom was, as indeed it is, a mere shadow.

no injury thence be derived either to our understanding of, or regard for, the most useful and necessary truths.

And here occurs one of the most specious objections, which, in this age of scepticism and affected moderation in religion, you hear from every quarter. "What is truth?" "The Bibles of various parties and denominations are all persuaded that they are in possession of her, though they have no more charity for one another than they have for avowed Infidels. All profess to believe the Gospel, but what the Gospel is they cannot agree among themselves. How happens it that these Evangelical Truths are not expressed in Scripture with more precision, and so guarded against the possibility of a mistake, that we should not see so many diverse opinions concerning them: All pretended to be drawn from the Bible, all patronised by some party or other? Amidst such endless ambiguities, how can the Scripture be a sufficient criterion of truth to an honest enquirer?"

Perhaps this whole objection is more than half answered by this plain direction, "be serious."

serious." Simple as such an answer may seem, it is what our Lord gave to the Jews on a similar occasion *. For safely may it be affirmed, that if men who are moved by such objections had ever seriously investigated the truth for themselves with a desire to be see right in their most important concerns, they would have soon seen the weakness of them, that they result from the deepest ignorance of Scripture, and the most careless gaiety of heart. A tolerable insight into the genius of Christianity will enable a man to distinguish between her vital parts and all circumstantial. The former are few, simple, and palpably, nay, invincibly evident to those who make use of the *light and mode* of instruction peculiarly belonging to it : The latter may be very numerous, and a fruitful human imagination may multiply them without end. But while superficial or sceptical professors of Christianity smile over the diversity of opinions which prevails with respect to these, *serious* persons know that this no more affects the symmetry of the whole system, than their inability to count the spots of the sun prevents their seeing of his light, or their being warmed with his beams. I say, serious persons : For it is hardly

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* John vii. 17.

to be expected that any but those whose passions are interested in the truths of Christianity, will pay so much attention to the subject, as to distinguish between a vital part and that which is adventitious. The man whose conscience is awakened will judge here, what else will elude the most penetrating understanding. Seriousness then is absolutely necessary in order to comprehend aright **EVANGELICAL TRUTH.**

It may be expected then, that I should shew what is this light and mode of instruction peculiarly belonging to Christianity : What are its vital truths, which I have affirmed to be few, simple, and invincibly evident to those who use this light and mode. If this be done, it will be granted that there is no force at all in the objection.

I would set out with a divine declaration concerning the sufficiency of the Scriptures to teach a man the way of salvation.—*The holy Scriptures are able to make a man wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus* *. I have selected this single text out of many that might be produced. I reckon it then a certainty,

* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

tainty, and a certainty on the best of Grounds, God hath said it, that notwithstanding all the diversities of opinions the scriptures are able to make a man wise unto salvation. If immense learning, indeed, was necessary for this purpose, the bulk of mankind would be in a pitiable case. But it is not so: Much learning indeed may be requisite to enable a man to give to the world a systematical perversion of the Scriptures, and to explain away their meaning, as it has been done with unhappy ingenuity by many commentators: But to take in its true meaning in order to be savingly wise, needs neither depth of genius nor erudition. It needs, indeed, the illumination of the same Spirit that first gave the word. This is the light and mode of instruction belonging to Christianity; the natural darkness of man (which we shall presently consider) requiring it. Nor is this in the least an argument against the sufficiency of the Scriptures, or the clearness and accuracy with which they are written. Accurate and clear, sufficient and full they are; but if our understandings be naturally dark with respect to divine things, all the revelations in the world will not give light, unless accompanied with an illumination of the understanding.

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This idea of the necessity of the communication of a *spiritual understanding** should, one would think, be entitled to a fair hearing from two considerations. First, that every science has certain rules and orders within itself, the necessity or expediency of which flows from its own nature, and the observation of which every master has a discretionary right to impose on his disciples. Well then may the same thing be expected, when God Almighty publishes a book, and deigns to become the preceptor of his creatures. Surely so peculiar a case may well require peculiar circumstances: What, if no such divine illumination be needful for the understanding of other sciences? Each has its peculiarities: What wonder if this be the peculiarity of Christianity?

Secondly, Let the dilemma be considered to which the affair is reduced: Either the scriptures are insufficient for the purposes for which they were given, or mankind have generally misapplied and abused them. To say the first, is the height of blasphemy: The latter then is true: and if true, in what consists their misconduct more eminently than in this, the contempt of the office of the Holy Ghost in teach-

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* Coloss. i. 9.

*ing the heart**? No wonder men cannot understand the Scriptures, but *are tossed to and fro with every wind of doctrine*†, while they despise, or only neglect the teaching of the Spirit. With this light how is it possible to be essentially deceived? Without it, how is it possible for the natural man, who receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, nor can know them‡, to be established in real truth at all? In short, in proportion as men's ideas of the importance and necessity of his illumination are diminished, their idea of the utility of the Scriptures is diminished also: They make objections, like those we are obviating, against them, which have a tendency even to take away the use of them entirely; and though they may see this consequence in some measure, they behold it with a profane indifference.

Let men no longer then speak of the insufficiency of the Scriptures to satisfy inquiring minds, while they neglect the means appointed by God for that end, to pray for and receive the illumination of his Spirit. When I set myself to search the word, let me, with awful reverence and humble prayer, look
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* Collect for Whitsunday. † Eph. iv. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. xi. 14.

up to the Holy Ghost for light and wisdom. Let me never expect any success without the use of this method. What stronger proof can be given of the justness of this representation than experience and the positive directions of the word itself? Could one ask every soul in the world that has read the Bible, whether they have seriously used this method, those, who look on the Scriptures as foolish, as confused, as self-contradictory, or as unimportant, would all confess, or if they would not confess, their consciences would witness against them, that they never made use of these positive directions of the word. And how arrogant is it for men to complain, when they do not obey God, and yet expect to be as successful as those who do? For the satisfaction resulting from the communication of a *spiritual understanding* cannot be made over to others by those who receive it. Let us hear St. James speak. *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not : and it shall be given him**. How frequently did our Lord promise, in consequence of his ascension, to send down the *spirit of truth, to lead his Disciples into all truth!*

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* James i. 5.

*truth**! How ardently does the Psalmist pray continually that God would teach him his statutes, and open his eyes to behold the wonderful things of his law †! How earnestly does the Apostle Paul pray for the Ephesians, that the eyes of their understanding may be enlightened ‡! But I shall not argue this point. He that denies the necessity of divine illumination in order to understand the Scriptures, might as well deny the divine inspiration of the Scriptures themselves; at least he must throw out as spurious one chapter written professedly on this subject§. Thus far then we have shewn, that men's mistakes concerning the essentials of Christianity ought to be ascribed to their neglect of divine illumination, not to any want of clearness in the Scriptures themselves. But it is still said, "after all the deduction that can be made of circumstances, in which all may safely err, and after all the illumination of the Spirit, we see many who profess to know the most and to pray much also, jarring with one another, not about

* John xvi. 13. *The truth*; as the article requires it should be rendered, that is Evangelical Truth. For it is not pretended that this special illumination is necessary for the purposes of common life; nor where it is necessary, does it destroy, but rather give and regulate right reason.

† Psalm cxix. *passim*. — ‡ Eph. i. 18. — § 1 Cor. ii.

about lesser circumstances, but about those things which each conceive to be essential in religion."

It is true: And if those good men, who give occasion for this cavil, considered the thing as they ought, they might perhaps learn, that they do more harm to real godliness by their mutual contentions, than good to souls by all their knotty disquisitions. For, after all, this is but a cavil: It would be easy to shew that the disputes among good men arise from two causes, one mentioned by St. Paul*, the other by St. James†: That in reality they mean the same thing; and that their contentions are for the most part, if not altogether, a mere strife of words‡. That this may be more clearly shewn, and the very foundation of the whole objection be overturned, let us endeavour to shew the few simple truths, or rather the *single truth* to which all the rest are reducible, through which, in the use of the light and mode of instruction above ascertained, all cordial receivers of Christianity are, and ever were, and will be firmly agreed. If we can rescue this jewel from the rubbish with which it is too frequently covered by
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* 1 Cor. xiii. 9. † James iii. 2. ‡ Λογμαρχία 1 Tim. vi. 4.

angry disputants, we shall see, perhaps, the criterion of EVANGELICAL TRUTH to be more simple than it is generally imagined ; we shall do well to contemplate its native beauties, till we be transformed into their likeness*, and to remove as far from the dust of contention as our situation in this imperfect scene of things will admit. St. John describes the whole of EVANGELICAL TRUTH in one verse. *This is the record that God hath given to us eternal life ; and this life is in his Son†.* Those who ask of Jesus, *what is truth?* receive this answer. That no doubt may be left concerning this matter, and that the sense of the words I have quoted may be fixed by the consideration of parallel places, let us hear the same Apostle set forth the same truth in other words in another place : *We have seen and do testify, that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world‡.* And let us hear St. Paul to the same purpose : *This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners§.* Where is then any real necessity for that endless diversity of opinions which prevails in the religious world ? All who know themselves lost sinners will see that Christ the Saviour of the lost|| is the sum and glory

* 2 Cor. iii. 18.—† 1 John v. 2.—‡ 1 John iv. 14.—
§ 1 Tim. i. 15.—|| Luke xix. 10.

glory of Scripture, and that there is not a consideration in religion that is not reducible to this simple point, which, to the serious, is the ALL in religion, however the careless may roam from idea to idea, from system to system, in fastidious indolence of disquisition. He who knows *the plague of his own heart**, and sees the fulness of the Gospel-remedy, will easily, in the light and mode of instruction above-described, reduce all the Scripture to one whole, and make one grand truth of all revelation: Though I shall have no debate with those who may chuse to branch it into three; for such a division is quite easy, obvious, and natural.

I. *Original sin*. The state of sin, the death of the soul, with all its dreadful appendages and fruits, in which the human race are involved by nature. This is self-evident. What means a Saviour of the world, if the world be not previously in a lost dark state†?

II. Full salvation from this state by Jesus Christ, and the recovery of the saved soul to a state of everlasting life, and all this a free gift of God unto him.

III. In

* 1 Kings viii. 38.—† Rom. iii. 10—20.

III. In consequence of this salvation a change in the sinner's state, called in Scripture regeneration, or new birth *——productive of true holiness, by which the man lives unto God.

All this is contained in the truth, that God hath given his Son to be the Saviour of the lost world.

Let a man run over in his mind the contents of the whole book, and see whether they are not consonant to this simple account of EVANGELICAL TRUTH. The Bible begins with the account of man's primitive rectitude, and describes his dreadful fall in the next place, the melancholy consequences of which are delineated throughout Scripture-history. The gradual preparations made for the introduction of the Saviour in type and figure, in prophecy and history, take up, as it were, the whole Old Testament. The New gives us his history, describes him in all his glorious offices and saving benefits; explains, both in history and in doctrine, the exact manner of effectually applying his salvation; and having favoured us with Pisgah-glimpses of the heavenly happiness hereafter to be revealed †, and given a tender
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* John iii.—† Rev. two last chapters.

parting-call to the reader, to accept of him *, concludes. I cannot pretend, in a short essay, to illustrate all these particulars; the reader who chuses may see them for the most part well done in Edwards's History of the Redemption.

Let us not then content ourselves with a bare notion of the *truth*, but, wherever we meet with the expression in Scripture, consider the *power* of it. That all Scripture refers to this one truth, may be still more amply evidenced by the consideration of some of those passages in Scripture, where the expression occurs. To mention a few of them: *Ye shall know the truth*, saith our Lord, *and the truth shall make you free* †. — *Sanctify them through thy truth* ‡, he prays to his Father for his disciples. *I came into world*, says he to Pilate, *that I should bear witness unto the truth*: *Every one that is of the truth, beareth my voice* §. *Who hath bewitched you*, saith St. Paul to the Galatians, *that ye should not obey the truth* ||? *That they all might be damned, who believed not the truth* †, saith the same Apostle. *Ye have purified your souls*, saith St. Peter, *in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren* **. *For the truth's sake*, saith St.

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John,

* Rev. xxii. 17. — † John viii. 32. — ‡ John xvii. 17. —
John xviii. 37. — || Gal. iii. 1. — † 2 Theff. ii. 12. —

** 1 Pet. i. 22.

John, *which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever* *. In all these places the Greek article is found, which points out to us not truth in general, not a number of truths, but *the* truth, something that by way of eminence deserves to be so called, which gives the law to all other truths in the Bible, and receives it from none. By this truth we are told is received true freedom of mind, and sanctification of heart and life. The reception of it implies obedience to the voice of the Son of God. Those that receive it not, are said to be bewitched, and *Jesus Christ crucified* is its object. Those who reject this truth are damned, those who receive it purify their souls unto unfeigned love of the brethren, *this truth dwells in the disciples, and shall be with them for ever*. What can this one truth be but that one which I have set forth, *the record that God hath given of his Son*? I shall not argue so clear a point, but apply what has been said to the solution of the objection: Setting aside many circumstantial, in which men may safely err, there are but few truths of Scripture of an essential nature; or, to speak more properly, there is but one, concerning which all believers (I mean those who deserve the

* 2 John ii.

the name*) are firmly agreed. This truth is, the testimony of the word of God concerning Jesus Christ, that he came into the world to save sinners fully, freely, and eternally. So little room then in reality does the Scripture give for the diversity of opinions, that it calls for perfect unity of sentiment; the diversity itself being owing to the corruption and blindness of human nature in the worst, as well as the remains of that corruption and blindness in the best. The evidence of this truth, whence arises so full an agreement among believers, and such complete satisfaction to their own minds, is far greater than what can arise from any argumentation, in which mankind are apt to deceive both themselves and others. It is the evidence of internal experience: I feel myself thus lost and miserable: I experience such an healthful change in my whole moral system:—So that upon the whole, Christianity is the true cure of Scepticism; and to the seriously disposed, who submit to the teaching of the Spirit, it gives the highest internal evidence of its own truth. The man found himself

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* For no doubt many who call themselves Believers are not so: What numbers, for instance, expect salvation by their own deeds? This is not receiving the *gift* of the Son: this is giving God the lie, 1 John v. 10. This is denying themselves to be lost sinners: this is, in short, denying the whole truth.

naturally averse to all good, ignorant of God, and without either love or gratitude towards him, selfish and hard-hearted with respect to his fellow-creatures. By putting his trust in Christ he has attained peace of conscience, love, and new views of the glory of God. He has experienced a real change in his affections and tempers: Surely, he must be allowed to be a competent judge of what he has felt, he may preach too by his life the truth and power of the Gospel to others; and as he will find his evidences increase more and more, he may be more and more happy from the consciousness of God within him now *, and the prospect of perfect bliss hereafter.

If it be asked, Where are such persons to be found? it is confessed their number is but rare: We may thank for this the contempt of the operations of the Holy Ghost, which prevails in our days. A serious desire of knowing the real truth, and a spirit of submission to this divine teaching, are things which the *truth* requires of all who seek it. If you refuse this, you unreasonably refuse to Christianity her own mode and order of things: you strip her of her arms, and then complain of her feebleness and

* Col. i. 27. 2 Cor. xiii. v.

and impotency. But if you submit to be the scholar of Jesus indeed, you will find, by experience, whether he will not give you *to know the truth*, and whether *the truth will not make you free*.

P A R T III.
S E C T I O N I.

Faith.

THE line of distinction between Christian Faith and Heretical Pravity, which our author calls almost imperceptible*, has been drawn, I think, with some degree of scriptural exactness and simplicity. Let us now advert to some of its fair and obvious consequences, and see what advantage they will give us in rescuing Christianity from his aspersions.

He is pleased to give us this idea of Faith. "Miracles that exceeded not the measure of their own experience inspired them with the most lively assurance of mysteries, which were acknowledged to surpass the limits of their understanding. It is this deep impression of super-

* Page 529.

supernatural truths, which has been so much celebrated under the name of Faith; a state of mind described as the surest pledge of the divine favour and of future felicity, and recommended as the first, or perhaps the only merit, of a Christian. According to the more rigid Doctors, the moral virtues, which may be equally practised by Infidels, are destitute of any value or efficacy in the work of our justification*.”

Mr. Hume has a sentence so homogeneous to this, that it deserves to follow it, and may throw some light upon it. “Among ourselves, some (the more rigid Doctors of Mr. Gibbon) have been guilty of that atrociousness, unknown to the Egyptian and Grecian superstitions, of declaiming in express terms against morality; and representing it as a sure forfeiture of the divine favour, if the least trust or reliance be laid upon it†.”

As these Gentlemen have ventured into an unknown region, and behave in that aukward manner in which the most sagacious are apt to do, when meddling with things to which they have never been accustomed, it behoves us to correct,

* Page 479. —† Dialogues, p. 248.

correct, if we can, the impertinent intrusion, and dissipate that confusion of ideas to which their inaccurate mode of thinking exposes the all-important doctrine of justification. I may well call it an unknown region to them; justification is a purely scriptural idea, and signifies not only the forgiveness, but also the honourable acquittal of a sinner at the bar of God, by declaring him righteous in his sight. The reader will do well to weigh the importance of this subject, as one who has an immortal soul. It is even impossible to form any lively, solid, and useful ideas of the subject without this seriousness of mind. He who looks on sin as nothing, or next to nothing, conceives the majesty and holiness of God as nothing, or next to nothing, and justification must, of course, be to him a barren unpromising subject. But the man in whom conscience is allowed to do its work with strict impartiality, whose mind is at all enlightened with awful views of the Divine Majesty, and with just views of the divine law, must surely, (tho' he be the most innocent and upright of men in a comparative sense) with Job, abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes*. An accurate survey of himself will convince him that

* Job. xlii. 6.

that he is a sinner by nature as well as by practice, and that his soul is naturally in that state of moral death, in which the Scripture represents all men, and from which alone the redemption of Christ can deliver us. I speak seriously, I never knew a man who gave probable evidence of an honest, careful, insight into himself, and of a just cultivation of all proper means of informing himself concerning God, his duty and the value of his soul, and the evidences of Christianity, but he would ingenuously confess he was thus corrupt and sinful : And, as far as I can judge from observation, the direct contrary was the case of all who were of a different opinion.

Let then this *serious* man be brought to the Scripture. Its description of himself (for no book in the world but the Bible gives such an unpleasing view of human apostacy) will soon convince him, that the book was the production of him who knows what is in man, and will dispose him to listen to the account of the remedy. He finds, as has been shewn, that all Christianity may be reduced to this, That God has given us eternal life, and that this life is in his Son. When this is truly understood, and seen in its own glorious light, it will not
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only reflect the highest honour on all the perfections of the Supreme Being, and particularly on the surprising union of justice and mercy, but it will suggest the only possible plan in the world for the relief of his guilty conscience. How shall he, a guilty sinner, become righteous in the eyes of infinite purity? This is the burden of his soul; nor can such a man rest till he obtain satisfaction. No reasonable man can call this a frivolous metaphysical cobweb; to a mind at all impressed with suitable ideas of the most important interests of man, or to humour the Sceptic, what may be, for any thing he knows to the contrary, the most important interests of man, the subject of justification must swallow up all other subjects in point of weight and dignity.

“What shall I do to be saved? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved*,” is the Scripture answer. Short and decisive. The proper merit, consideration, atonement, or whatever you call it, for the sake of which God Almighty is pleased to accept any sinner as righteous, and bestow on him eternal life, is not that of himself, no work, no endeavour, no duty, no virtue of his of any kind, religious,

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* Acts xvi. 31.

or social, or private*, but it is the righteousness of Jesus Christ alone†. Thus all Scripture speaks, wherever the subject of justification before God is introduced: It is this view of things alone that gives God his glory in the way of salvation by Christ, and affixes a determinate idea to that common, but too often unmeaning sound, OUR SAVIOUR: And thus those who are actually arrived at heaven, who have doubtless the clearest views of things, are represented as singing, *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.* ‡

We are now arrived at the true idea of FAITH. Even sound reason requires, that that which alone has satisfied Divine Justice, should alone be the ground of our dependence.

He then, who, without his own works, in point of dependence ||, freely and unreservedly ventures on the foundation that has been described for his eternal happiness, from just views of God in Christ, and of his own depravity and unworthiness, he only is a Christian believer. All who falsely call themselves such, and reject this way of salvation, reject the cross of Christ and God's gift of eternal life, by looking
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* Rom. xi. 6.—† Rom. v.—‡ Rev. v. 9.—|| Rom. iv.

on the former as insufficient to purge away their sins, and by absolutely denying the latter. If eternal life be given, there is no way of receiving it but by faith; if it be sold, there is no way of purchasing it but by works: And here it is on the subject of justification that the Scripture-religion differs from all the religions in the world; and the man seriously affected, as above described, will find solid peace of mind, as soon as he is established in this faith, and never in any other way, because he must be persuaded, that he who believeth not in Christ must be damned*, as Christ himself declares, and his own conscience will testify, that the damnation is just.

The reader is earnestly intreated to consider seriously the view that has been given of justification, and to examine what the Bible and his own heart may teach him of its importance; and the two sentences with which I set out, may now soon be dispatched.

He will allow that the "state of mind described, is the surest pledge of the Divine Favour and of future felicity;" but he will deny that "faith is recommended as the first, or, perhaps,

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* Mark xv. 16.

the only merit of a Christian." He will affirm, that it is no merit at all; that Christ alone is all his merit; he will allow, "that the moral virtues are destitute of any virtue or efficacy in the work of justification;" but he will say the same of faith and of all religious duties whatever, laying the whole weight, where the Scripture does, on the offering of Christ on the cross once for all *. He knows of none who follow the religion of the Bible, who were ever guilty of declaiming in express terms against morality: He owns it is a sure forfeiture of the Divine Favour, if the least trust or reliance be laid upon it, because this is that unbelief to which the Saviour threatens damnation, and because he alone is the end of the law for righteousness to a sinner †. But then he would discard all religious duties, and even faith itself in the same sense in which he discards morality; and, of course, the candid and attentive reader sees, there is no ground for the insinuation of both these authors, that Christian believers magnify faith at the expence of morality; an insinuation which I impute to their extreme ignorance of the whole subject to which they adverted.

May

* Heb. x. 10.—† Rom. x. 4.—‡ Rom. vi.

May men then safely neglect good works, and yet be saved? How naturally does this objection occur! so it did to the opposer of St. Paul; yet he does not in the least weaken his view of justification; though he boldly denies the consequence, and brings the necessity of holiness and virtue (in which true believers must and ever will excel all others) to its true basis. This may be taken notice of in the next Section: at present let Mr. Gibbon ask himself, though the selfish motive of good works as the grand one be withdrawn, whether it be not possible to conceive a much higher and nobler motive; and if he is still jealous of the honour of moral virtue, let him learn from St. Paul, the great defender of Christian faith, that charity is even greater than it in value and importance, and cease at length to accuse a system which he does not understand.

SECTION II,

The peculiar Nature of Christianity.

OUR author speaks of some illustrious Pagan characters, which "in our eyes," says he, "might have seemed the most worthy of the
" heavenly

“ heavenly present. The names of Seneca, of
 “ the Elder and the Younger Pliny, of Tacitus,
 “ of Plutarch, of Galen, of the slave Epictetus,
 “ and of the Emperor M. Antoninus, adorn
 “ the age in which they flourished, and exalt
 “ the dignity of human nature.” After de-
 scanting, with apparent pleasure, on the virtues
 of these favourite heroes, he observes, “ yet
 “ all these sages” (it is no less an object of sur-
 prise than of concern) “ overlooked or rejected
 “ the perfection of the Christian system.” *

I believe no man, who knows properly what
 the Christian system is, will be in the least
 surprized at this, though it calls for the real
 concern of every Philanthropist. There are
 numbers who call themselves Christians at this
 day, who reject the system as really, though
 not so grossly, as these antient sages, and their
 disposition to admire these in preference to
 Christian saints, is a demonstration *what manner*
of spirit they are of.

The doctrine of justification will lead us into
 a discovery of the *peculiar nature* of Christ’s re-
 ligion; so peculiar, so totally distinct from all
 ideas of all other religions, that it is no matter
 of

of surprise at all, that even the most striking miracles, and other the most powerful attestations of divine truth, wrought no salutary effect at all on minds entirely prejudiced against this doctrine.

To set this matter in a just point of view, it will be proper to give a concise view of the religious system of the Pagan Philosophers, to shew how far all religions that we have heard of, are inimical to the peculiar doctrine explained in the last Section; and then, after tracing the proper moral effects of this doctrine on a Christian believer, to shew the total contrariety of Christianity from them all.

The most renowned of the antient philosophers were pretty unanimous in supporting the doctrine of the *το ἐν*. God was with them a sort of subtil spirit which penetrated all nature, and was therefore literally "the soul of the universe."

Mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet.

VIRG.

The souls of men were particles of this universal numen; and, after their separation from the bodies to which they had been united, were
absorbed

absorbed into the *το iv*, or animated other bodies in endless progression. The consequences of this horrid system are obvious. It is much the same as that revived by Spinoza. The idea of God is totally evaporated, since it allows of no Being superior to ourselves. Prayer, humility, and whatever belongs to religious worship are hence totally excluded, except the hypocritical conformity to the established religions of their country, which, however superstitious and absurd, were surely not so contrary to the moral sense and natural conscience of men, as this religion, shall I call it? or irreligion of the Philosophers. The idea of guilt, or even of the possibility of a future state of punishment is jostled out of this system; for they feared no tribunal superior to that of their own breasts. * Instead of fearing the judgment of God because of their sins, which is surely a very natural object of fear to a Being so weak, corrupt, and sinful as man, they rather talked of arrogating divine honours to themselves †. The first and com-

* *Mors aut plane negligenda est, si omnino extinguit animum, aut etiam optanda, si aliquo eum deducit, ubi sit futurus æternus. Atqui tertium certe nihil inveniri potest.*

Cicero de Senectute.

† *Sic me colitote ut deum.* So Cyrus dying is introduced in Cicero's Dialogue de Senectute.

commanding doctrine of Christianity is justification. Whatever evidences of the religion be offered, prejudice would be blind to them all, while the nature of the religion itself is abhorred. Antoninus's works, and Epictetus's too, nay all, or nearly all the remains of philosophical antiquity evince, that their system was no other than what has been explained. How could haughty independent gods submit to be taught a way of obtaining pardon as guilty criminals from the God of gods! Will any person be surprised at their rejection of Christianity? Does the enmity of such men tend in the least to invalidate its credibility? The learned reader will soon satisfy himself from Cicero de Senectute and his Tusculan Disputations, that this proud atheistic system was really the creed of the Philosophers. We are easily dazzled by the glare of some luminous sentences, considered in a detached point of view, to suppose them to have been much nearer Christian truth than the Pagan vulgar. But their notions reduced to a whole, do really appear to have been still more remote from the Gospel. Bishop Warburton* has, I think, amply proved the point before us. It is worth any man's while to peruse him, in order to gain

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* Leg. of Moses, vol. ii. b. iii.

a clear insight into that text, "the world by wisdom knew not God*." Sallust expresses the whole doctrine thus: "Animus incorruptus æternus, rector humani generis, agit atque habet cuncta, neque ipse habetur."

All other religions in the world, besides the Christian, though not so totally abhorrent from natural conscience, do, however, all agree in teaching men to look for justification from their own works. The Philosophers having hardened their hearts against all inward sense of sin, and, in proportion as they avoided gross enormities, having inflated themselves with spiritual pride, could not have any plan of justification. They were no sinners. Other Pagans, who had not reasoned themselves out of the natural feelings of conscience, felt themselves sinners in some degree; but their views of sin were so frivolous, as to enable them to speak peace to conscience by a round of religious ceremonies. And what means the Mahometan by his lustrations, the Papist by his masses, the Bramin by his austerities, the Socinian by his boasted humanity, and the formal Protestant by his dependance on the sacrament, but to justify themselves before God by their works?

* 1 Cor. i. 21.

works? We conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law*, and he that believeth on me, hath everlasting life†: These divine aphorisms are equally rejected by them all. To give God all the glory of our justification is the peculiar praise of his own religion; to extol the merit of man, is the mark of all the religions in the world of man's invention.

I should certainly despair of evincing the importance of these views, were not their moral influence essentially important. Conceive now a man, through that divine influence which alone can overcome the opposition of apostate nature, submitting to be saved by pure grace, stripped of all pretensions to merit, feeling himself miserable, guilty, blind, and naked, discovering the holy nature of God, and in that light beholding the baseness of his best performances, humbled under a just view of his infinite inferiority to his Creator, and ready as a child, in undisputing simplicity, to receive the law from his lips. Conceive that God who is thus renewing his nature, to remove also the only obstruction that now remains to his happiness, the guilt of his sins, by the atoning

P 2

blood

* Rom. iii. 28.—† John vi. 47.

blood of his own Son. Conceive him to see in this light all the perfections of the Godhead to shine in a light hitherto unknown. He believes, he rejoices in God, he dares call him Father; he sees himself enriched with the gift of eternal life thro' the mere merit of another, the only-begotten Son of God. What must be the necessary result? Pride has here its death-wound; he no more stoops in weak dejection, nor raises himself in proud insensibility. An infant softness, but easy, chearful, and free, will take possession of the whole man. Tho' the mere selfish motive of obedience has lost its ascendant, it is succeeded by what is immensely better, love, joy, gratitude, delight. He loves God, and this he now finds at once to be virtue and happiness. What a fund of patient magnanimity must the prospect of eternal life afford to him amidst the sorrows of life, tho' they are not despised in Stoical pride, but felt in humble resignation, and thankfully endured as means of promoting his good. The fastidious pride of self-conceit is for ever broken: What humble reverential dispositions towards the Creator must succeed them! How must the love of God now expand itself toward mankind! He who is forgiven so much, can freely forgive his fellow-creatures. Nothing of a social, benevolent,

nevolent, amiable spirit can be wanting to him, who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to him*; and in the might of that love, with his back to the world, is travelling to heaven: But all other men must be slaves of sin; they have no principles that can emancipate them. Either guilt must deject, or stupidity must harden them. A Christian is a son of God: Others are either timorous or sullen slaves; either wallowing in open wickedness, or corroded by philosophical pride; indignant at this world's course of things; enemies in their minds to its supreme Governor; unwilling to submit their understanding to his; and destitute of any well-grounded hope of immortality. And while pride prevails, is it to be wondered at, if all the Antoninuses in the world, with all their false shew of virtues, should reject a religion which gives glory to God alone, and that many pretended Christians should not possess even the first principles of the Gospel?

* Rom. v. 5.

SECTION

SECTION III.

Future State.

WE have seen how the view given above of the general nature of Christianity, by the principles it affords of justification, and of a liberal plan of virtue, defends this divine religion from the common charge of encouraging licentiousness, and also accounts for the rejection of it by those who, in our author's eye, were the wisest and the best of mankind. It is now high time (but with serious reverence) to look into that which is or should be the most momentous of human cares, a future state, and to see what light principles peculiarly Christian throw upon it, at the same time that they dissipate the artificial gloom and misrepresentation of Infidelity.

Speaking of the Millennium, (he should have said the heavenly state, succeeding the last general resurrection, which is quite a distinct thing from the Millennium *) he says, " That
 " the New Jerusalem was quickly adorned
 " with

* Compare Rev. xx. with xxi.

" with all the gayest colours of the imagination.
 " A garden of Eden, with the amusements of
 " the pastoral life, was no longer suited to the
 " advanced state of human society which pre-
 " vailed under the Roman Empire. A city
 " was therefore erected of gold and precious
 " stones, &c." *

The tendency of this passage is to shew, that
 the advantages which the Gospel holds out to
 its faithful followers are very much of a mere
 worldly nature.

Mr. Hume takes a very different method.
 " I shall venture to affirm," says this dogma-
 tical Sceptic, " that there never was a popular
 " religion, which represented the state of de-
 " parted souls in such a light, as would render
 " it eligible for human kind, that there should
 " be such a state."—"As death lies between the
 " eye and the prospect of futurity, that event
 " is so shocking to nature, that it must throw
 " a gloom on all the regions which lie beyond
 " it †—nor is there any state of mind so happy
 " as the calm and equable: But this state it is
 " impossible to support, where a man thinks,
 " that he lies in such profound darkness and
 " uncertainty,

* Page 471.—† Dialogues of Natural Religion, p. 257.

“uncertainty, between an eternity of happiness
 “and an eternity of misery”—“gloom and melancholy, remarkable in all devout people.”*
 “The steady attention alone to so an important
 “an interest as that of eternal salvation, is apt
 “to extinguish the benevolent affections †.”

The tendency of these passages is still more poisonous, to teach us that what Christianity offers in a future life is not worth the having, and that the belief of it is an enemy to all true virtue in this.

Let us endeavour to state the true idea of that pregnant word HAPPINESS, as the Scripture states it, and then see how it will apply itself to answer these *hard speeches*.

The Gospel does not then profess to confer on its most faithful followers a perfect happiness in this life. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.* This sentence is as true in one age as in another. *If we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.* This shews that the perfect happiness we seek, is only to be enjoyed in the world to come. To be supported by the hope of it amidst the sins and sorrows of mortality,

* Dialogues of Natural Religion, p. 259—† P. 250.

tality; in which we all are born; and from which even the regenerate are far from being exempted in this imperfect state, and to have that *earnest of the Spirit* * which gives the soul at once an idea, a foretaste, and a preparative for heaven; this the Gospel offers us, this the Scriptures hold out as the object of our pursuit.

It is certain from them, that no gifts whatever that come from God, short of the gift of himself, can fill the mind of man. *God our portion for ever* †, *our exceeding great reward* ‡; this the most simple and the most sublime of all conceptions is happiness. Every object of the senses, every speculation that regales the intellect, fails thro' impotence, and even surfeits thro' satiety. A more rational thought can scarce be conceived, than that the bliss of the New Jerusalem should consist in this, *the glory of God did lighten it* §. Certainly He who fills all things, may be conceived himself to be all that is excellent and lovely, and all that enjoyment to us in which lies true happiness, in whom the understanding shall for ever contemplate, and the affections shall for ever delight. Other objects may be prized as

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means

* 2 Cor. i. 22. — † Ps. lxxiii. 26. — ‡ Gen. xv. 1. —
§ Rev. xxi. 23.

means leading to this end. This is itself the end. The mind, that has received a scriptural direction, rests in the LOVE of God itself as blifs, and looks no farther for the idea of HAPPINESS.

What then becomes of self-love *? It gratifies itself in the love of God, as its ultimum, just as the delight we take in a friend's conversation gratifies us for its own sake. One may defy the most ingenious Reasoner in the world to propose any scheme of blifs so rational as this of the Scriptures. As they continually declaim against worldly objects considered as the materials of blifs, as the New Testament continually contrasts the solidity of things *not seen* with the emptiness of things *seen*; and even the Old Testament has one book, the Ecclesiastes, professedly written to expose all worldly things as vanity, it required only a moderate share of attention and candour in Mr. Gibbon to see and own, that the description of the New Jerusalem in the Revelation, was conveyed under the images of gold and precious stones, not with a view to feed the avarice of Christians, but to enliven their ideas of spiritual glory by such sensible images, as are most adapted to strike

* See Butler's Sermon on the Love of God.

strike the imagination in our present state: But if this had been considered, his image of Eden and a pastoral life, compared with that of a golden city, had lost its force and propriety.

He then, who has *the earnest of the Spirit*, has this idea of bliss in as actual experience, as he has the idea of an odour from a flower. Like other men he is born without it in a blind and miserable state. When God gives him eternal life in his Son, he gives him a foretaste of heaven in the knowledge and love of himself. No rational or sensitive powers can create this; it is a pure emanation from God; a new perception altogether, though it takes away none of his former perceptions, but leaves them all in their full strength, and many of them are meliorated by it. He discharges all duties political, domestic, and selfish; but *rests* in God alone, and waits for the eternal completion of his hope. Thus that gloom, with which divine things fill the mind, while unknown, is removed by a spiritual discovery of their nature. Christ crucified is the medium in which the LOVE of GOD illustriously shines; and the pardon of sin, the peace of conscience, and the prospect of a joyful resurrection to eternal life, are more than sufficient to over-

come the fear of death and the world unseen ; they render eternal objects of all others the most amiable and inviting. That this eternal life is given in Christ, and not bought by our works, while it enlarges the idea of the LOVE of GOD exceedingly, and amplifies the food on which the happy soul must feed ; it also gives peace to the conscience, and affords a foundation to the humbled believing sinner of the most solid assurances of bliss. A view of GOD INCARNATE, redeeming him by his own blood, exalts unmeasurably the idea of the greatness of this bliss. He only, who can conceive the dignity of God, and the astonishing greatness of his condescension in the work of redemption, can conceive how great that happiness must be, which is the result of such an amazing method.*

Let now the reader seriously weigh the amiable description of charity in 1 Cor. xiii. and consider what a view the Apostle gives us of the humble, gracious, and permanent nature of this queen of virtues, how it first will adhere to God, and then, for his sake, to all his people ; and he will see how exactly this suits with the idea of happiness before us, and be prepared to see what weight there is in the assertions of both these authors.

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* 1 Peter i. 18.

The total exclusion of every thing of a worldly nature from the scriptural idea of happiness, leaves no room for Mr. Gibbon's invidious reflection concerning gold and precious stones.

And would Mr. Hume venture, after any degree of candid attention to the Scriptures, to have asserted, That Christianity represented not a future state in an eligible light? O the force of Scripture-truth! Even an Infidel, while he opposes, confirms it. *Marvel not that I said unto thee, ye must be born again*—the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: For they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned†*—these sentences were never more confirmed than by his assertion. He confesses their truth, and owns the bliss of heaven itself to be folly to his taste! Were he within my reach, I would press on his mind the necessity of the New Birth, even to enjoy heaven itself: The place, without the changed heart, must give inexpressible torment to the mind.—There remain only two more detached remarks of Mr. Hume to be examined; a word on each will suffice.

First,

* John iii.—† 1 Cor. ii. 14.

First, All devout people are melancholy. I have been, I suppose, far more in the company of such than Mr. Hume's prejudices would ever permit him to be. I have seen them in various scenes of life, and in the awful hour of death itself ; and I do declare from my own observation the assertion to be as false as falsehood can make it. No ; devout people are chearful people ; and in death itself I have seen them supremely so. But I can conceive how the reserve and awe, which the accidental company of a man so horribly impious and so profoundly sagacious as Mr. Hume might strike a pious mind, would by him be construed into melancholy.

Secondly, That the belief of an eternal life, whose nature is LOVE, should lessen the benevolent affections, is too ridiculous a thought to be imposed on the weakest understanding.

S E C T I O N IV.

Humanity.

“**T**HEY had been commanded to extirpate some of the most idolatrous tribes, and the execution of the Divine Will
had

had seldom been retarded by the weakness of humanity*." So speaks our author of the Jews, who, under the conduct of Joshua, took possession of the land of Canaan by that best of charters, the gift of God, and destroyed the antient inhabitants by that strongest of all commissions, the Divine Command.

Humanity is the boast of the present day. Many a thoughtless spendthrift will go to weep over virtue in distress at a play-house, while honest men are deprived of their right by his cruel extravagance. Suicide prevails in the land; the law has provided the wholesome barrier of shame, by a disgraceful interment, to stop the madness of those whom a sense of honour might sooner move than the fear of God; but the Coroner's fashionable humanity eludes its execution. An audacious profaneness, with gigantick strides, menaces every thing sacred and venerable among us. But the humanity of Magistrates will screen the most daring profanations of the Lord's day, and the interest of the kingdom of heaven must suffer, lest senseless sinners should lose a little worldly gain. Children of both sexes advance more and more into the regions of profligate lewdness, and unlettered

* Page 453.

lettered impudence : But Solomon was inhuman it seems, as well as unwise, when he wrote, *Chasten thy son, while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.*

If this humour of exalting humanity, at the expence of law and order, justice and equity, and every rule of good government, both in publick and private life, should proceed a few degrees higher, it is evident that our whole state must become a “ rudis indigestaque moles.”

Men of sense must see, that humanity itself may be carried to a most vicious excess in human society ; and men of candour will see, that I mean only to guard against this excess, and to shew that humanity itself, though most amiable and most endearing in its nature, ought to move within certain limits, and to feel the constraint of principle, or it defeats its own end, and becomes the foe of the human species.

Did it require an uncommon degree of penetration in Mr. Gibbon to see, that the same quality, attended with the same excesses, applied to the Divine Government, may also be very absurd and ruinous ? I speak of him as
insinuating,

insinuating, that the cruelties of the Israelites in Canaan could never proceed from God, nor be justified in their own nature; nor shall I argue this point, but leave it to his own conscience and the reader's judgment. There is a system of government in the world; God Almighty is its head: In many instances his laws execute themselves, both in rewards and in punishments, in the natural course of things. He is pleased also to inflict many punishments on sinners in a more extraordinary way. The Jewish dispensation was much concerned in this: The chosen people were appointed the executioners of the Divine Vengeance on idolaters. If of themselves, to satiate malice or ambition, they dealt deaths around, let them be given up to the censure of the most unmerciful criticism, and let Roman ferocity, deceit, and pride, which for so many ages tormented the earth, be called patriotism, virtue, and fortitude, in comparison of Jewish inhumanity: But if Moses, Joshua, and David acted in obedience to a Divine Command, let their pious zeal be rescued from the abusive obloquy of infidelity. Shall any man say, That God has no right to punish guilty nations? Has he a right to do it, without the intervention of men, by the plague, by lightning, by water, by various

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desolating

desolating judgments? There is no medium in this case: If the Israelites had no right to destroy the Canaanites; if David was wrong in the severities exercised on the Ammonites, who burnt their own children to Moloch*, (a Divine Command being always supposed in the case) men need not have recourse to the case of eternal punishments: That may be more shocking to that treacherous faculty, the imagination; but sober reason will see a smaller injustice to be as real in a lesser case, as in a greater. And the whole course of God's Providence at this day, so full of severe judgments and afflictions, must be as utterly inexplicable as any thing of the kind we meet with in the Scriptures, and as really offensive to the interests of humanity.

In fact, I find Mr. Hume thus boldly rebelling against the government of God in *hard speeches* †: What is to be said in this case?

Let humanity know her province, and neither reason nor act in contradiction to the Divine Authority and true principles of virtue. The eternal life which God gives in his Son consists

* G. note 1 on chap. xvi. This at least seems to me the most natural light of considering this subject.

† Hume's Dialogues, p. 207.

consists in LOVE; love of God in the first place, and of all Beings whatever in due subordination. If the health of the whole require the sacrifice of some, let humanity submit to justice; in all other cases let her thrive and flourish. This is no more than what human judicatures are doing continually; and had Mr. Gibbon considered that we cannot possibly be judges of that which is fit for God to do, but ought to submit to his will; and yet that we may be judges of plain matter of fact, of what is divinely revealed, he had spared this weak and inconsiderate innuendo.

Indeed it is true, however our author's humanity may be affected with it, that the primitive Christians did believe; nay, what is more, that the Gospel requires all its professors to believe, that eternal punishments await the impenitent and the unbelieving. Till men can judge what is the quantity of evil that is in sin, how far it is necessary that the honour of the Divine Government should be supported, and what are the mutual relations and dependencies of the whole system of things, they cannot possibly form the least judgment, *a priori*, in the case. Matter of fact, of which we may be judges, speaks strongly, in every point of view,

for the evil of sin, and the necessity of punishment; and humanity must be only an absurd rebel in undertaking to form any judgment at all. The Scriptures do certainly teach us, that God *afflicteth not willingly, nor grieveth the children of men*; nay, describe his Love as infinite and boundless. The redemption of Christ exhibits it in the most striking light; but then it implies and supposes the evil of sin to be extreme. Thus the nature of Christianity affords us ample principles to confute whatever an ill-tempered regard to humanity may suggest; and the common answer made to Infidels, deduced from our ignorance, will, I believe, appear solid to every reasonable man who coolly considers it.

But is there not danger of grafting inhumanity on piety from these principles? If indeed men indulge an inhuman temper under the mask of religious zeal, (and it often has been done) the most diabolical evils may ensue*. The principle then before us of checking

* To acquiesce in the justice of a judicial process, and to respect the uprightness of the judge, is one thing; to indulge a spirit of insult against the condemned criminal, is another; they originate from tempers of mind specifically distinct from one another. Whether Tertullian may have erred, in what our author calls his unfeeling witticisms, I will not contest.

ing humanity requires to be guarded, not to be exterminated. Christian faith will humbly and reverently submit the understanding and the will to God, without allowing herself in any sensations of malice to man: Zeal and love to God, and pity to men, may surely stand in perfect consistence. However paradoxical it may seem, that which is called orthodoxy may, and always is, when the heart is under real influence of Christian principles, be united with the most liberal benevolence to all mankind, the most ardent activity for their good, and the most determined abhorrence of a persecuting spirit *. But Mr. Hume is positive †, that it is contrary to common sense to entertain apprehensions or terrors upon account of any opinion whatsoever, or to imagine that we run any risque hereafter by the freest use of our reason. Astonishing Dogmatist! The man that could doubt of every thing which is plain to men of common sense, could yet have no doubt in a case of the most complicated and mysterious nature. Is he sure that no reasons may influence the Divine Mind in the case before us, besides those two which he mentions immediately

* See this union of things well supported in a Tract lately published, called "An Address to the Protestant Association."

† Dialogues, p. 259.

ly after ? Has he the line that measures the immensity of the Divine Mind ? And is it possible a man of moderate acquaintance with the human heart should be sure, that the freest use of our reason may not be chargeable with a high degree of pride and insolence, and would even he have allowed his menial servant the exercise of the same freedom in his domestic concerns ?

It would be inhuman, I suppose, to imagine any punishment should ensue. Satan seems to watch over the different follies and vices of different ages, and to improve them to the interest of his kingdom. In the ruder ages savage ferocity and superstition were predominant : These he nursed, and by these alone he maintained his seat. Where religious zeal prevailed, he pushed it to the extreme of inhumanity and political injustice : Now that refinement and civilization prevail, he causes humanity to swallow up all other virtues ; but notwithstanding the prevailing taste, I cannot but think the business of this Section to have been an humane employment.

SECTION

SECTION V.

Love of Glory.

WITH what agreeable reveries the antient philosophical heroes indulged themselves in speculation concerning the *Deity* of their souls, their views of a future state of existence were far too faint and dubious to influence much their practice and their conduct. The principle itself of the *to ev*, meeting with the natural pride of the human heart, in which its innate *depravity* peculiarly consists, would cherish and inflame it to a degree unknown to the Pagan vulgar. Hence the stern patriotism and stoical apathy; hence the rigid severity of manners, and the whole train of fictitious virtues, which catch the approbation of all, but those whom self-knowledge and heaven-taught views of the real glory of God have truly humbled. But the pride of the atheistic principle must have objects of gratification more real than the speculations of the unseen world could give; and it spent its whole force on the love of glory, that darling passion of Pagan antiquity, avowed by some indeed far more than by others, but followed by all pretenders to virtue

virtue as the grand motive, their most substantial reward.

The moderns, who admire Socrates and Plato more than Paul and Peter, follow their maxims and ideas; nor is there a greater enemy to Christianity *, its Divine Author himself being witness, than this same love of glory.

How much does our author deserve the sincere compassion of every real Christian, who declares, that "Fame is the motive, it is the reward of our labours, the most valuable object of our possessions, or at least of our hopes†." Not to be indifferent indeed to what men say of us, to guard against shame and reproach, and to be careful of our good name, but still in subserviency to infinitely more valuable considerations, is not inconsistent with Christianity. But to talk of Fame as the motive, the *most valuable object*, betrays a wretched taste indeed, and is as opposite to the Gospel as darkness is to light.

Here is then another instance of the opposition between the religion of Jesus and the spirit

* John v. 44. How can ye believe which receive honour one of another?

† Vindication, p. 42.

spirit of the world. Our author talks of the useful victories atchieved by MAN upon the barren hills of Palestine*; thus giving to MAN the praise which, without derogating from the offices of human industry, Moses undoubtedly ascribes to the peculiar blessing of God. *A land which the Lord thy God careth for : the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year, even unto the end of the year†.* And whether the Prophet's language, *Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; for wherein is he to be accounted of ?* or that of our author concerning the dignity and merit of man, be more agreeable to the corrupt and frail state of human nature and to matter of fact, every careful and modest observer may judge.

I am only concerned in the remainder of this Section to shew, that Christian principles exclude and condemn this love of glory, in the sense that has been explained.

The eternal life which God in Christ bestows upon believers, respects the world to come, not this world's advantages of any kind. The praise of men must not be sought; the maxims of the kingdom of heaven forbid it; and in-

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* Vindication, p. 32. —† Deut. xi. 12.

deed an hearty compliance with them will not lead to the praise, but to the contempt of mankind. To seek the esteem of men as a motive for our good actions, is the mask of an hypocrite*; indeed the knowledge of our fallen state, and of our recovery to a holy life as the mere gift of God, if we be recovered, is such an humbling consideration, as effectually excludes from a real believer's breast the indulgence of the love of praise. *Thou also hast wrought all our works in us*†: He will say, with gratitude, to his God in the world to come, even while he is receiving the reward of grace, which the overflowing bounty of his heavenly Father confers upon him, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world‡." So declares, with his usual vigour of emphasis, the Apostle of the Gentiles, and the man, who with him beholds Christ crucified as his grand object, *will be concerned for the glory of God*, not his own, in all his thoughts, words, and deeds. Such a display of the Divine Character, as that transaction exhibits, will swallow up all his ideas of glory, and leave him no other subject of admiration. Himself he beholds as justly obnoxious to the curse,

* Mat. vi. 2.—† Isaiah xxvi. 12.—‡ Gal. vi. 14.

curse, and as a sinner who might at this hour be *lifting up his eyes in hell-torments*, if he met with the due reward of his deeds. While he feels the impression of this truth, how can he be proud? How can he even desire the praise of men? His salvation is *of grace and not of works* *. Boasting is excluded †. When he considers the infamy of the cross, the contempt and scorn his Master endured, and the disregard which he ever shewed for the praise of men, how naturally must he follow his steps, and think meanly of the good opinion of that bad world which crucified the Lord of glory? The song of heaven is, *Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.*—How miserable must that man be in such society, who seeks his own praise? None there will gratify his passion: Another object, infinitely worthy of all blessing and praise, exhausts all their powers of encomium. How necessary that the love of glory be eradicated, to render even heaven desirable! The most unrestrained profligacy of temper and conduct is not more unsuitable to the temper of the heavenly world, than that passion for glory, which is so commonly deemed the mark of a great and generous mind. Persons of such a taste may be useful

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* Ephes. ii.—† Rom. iii.

and respectable citizens, they cannot be Christian believers.

It is natural for the reader to ask here, "Pray what is your motive for adding to the labours of the teeming press?" What my motive is, is known to the great Searcher of hearts. I will frankly own what I think it ought to be, and what I desire it may be one day found to have been. "*Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God* *". This alone is the motive that is acceptable in the sight of God. I look upon Mr. Gibbon's two last chapters as highly injurious to the honour of God, and in their direct tendency, notwithstanding the ambiguous windings of a reserved prudence, inimical to the salvation of precious souls, with which the divine glory is inseparably connected. I respect his learning and abilities, his elegant taste, and his powers of nervous description. I would not be thought to attempt any competition with him in these things: But a man of moderate knowledge and capacity, such is the advantage of a good cause, may defend the truth of God against the most ingenious and the most learned infidelity. There was a time when learned men

were

* 1 Cor. x. 31.

were not ashamed to employ their talents in the service of revealed religion: A Boyle, a Newton, and an Addison sincerely believed Christianity to be from God, and it was looked on as no reproach to their understandings, that they believed "that all Scripture was given by inspiration of God." But the tables are turned: While vice, profusion, and profligacy are corroding the very bowels of the nation, scarce any superior geniuses appear in print, but they enlist themselves in the service of infidelity. What such men think to gain for themselves and others by such a conduct, I know not: But the prospect is lamentable; and, admitting Christianity be true, God Almighty must be provoked. Every remaining rampart against iniquity is removed; and as this humour has increased, it is easy to see that all kinds of wickedness have increased in proportion. Satan laughs at such puny antagonists as moral philosophy and prudential considerations: Nothing, he knows, can prevent the progress of his kingdom but pure Christian principles. What renders this conduct the more culpable and dangerous, is the manner in which the enemies of Christianity proceed. They do not directly tell you they are opposing the Gospel; that would put the
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most unwary readers on their guard. They do not consider in form the evidences of Christianity, which, with triumphant argumentation, have been established by many respectable writers: That would be a task far too great even for Mr. Gibbon himself. But artful innuendos, pregnant hints, half-sentences, gilded always with a specious and modest appearance, are the arms with which they fight against heaven. If they think they have discovered the falsehood of the Gospel, why do they not avow their sentiments, and bring forth their arguments in form? If they are in doubt themselves, a more careful conduct in a matter of such infinite *moment* would surely become them, and even a tender and humane concern for their fellow-creatures would call for a very different behaviour. Mr. Gibbon cannot but be sensible, that the tendency of his two last chapters is to weaken in his reader's mind a regard for Christianity. Should that religion prove true in the issue, he may stand convicted of having contributed to the eternal damnation of many of his fellow-creatures. And what is fame or praise to a generous mind, when set against such dreadful mischief? In a word, he ought to have a full demonstration, that the Gospel is false, or his procedure

procedure cannot be cleared, I do not say of deliberate, but of very inconsiderate cruelty. Who that honours God and cares for souls, feeling at the same time any thing of the truth of Christianity, can be silent in such a case?

Si natura negat, facit indignatio versum.

Juv.

I pity the author, and desire the candid reader to excuse the warmth of my language: The Gospel calls for no cool assent: Its importance is even infinite; and if but one soul should, by these papers, be rescued from danger, my aim will be answered: It will richly pay for the scorn and contempt of all the rest of mankind.

SECTION VI.

Impiety.

MR. GIBBON, speaking of the usurpation of the titles of the Divinity by the Roman Emperors, observes, "such extravagant compliments, however, soon lose their impiety by losing their meaning; and when the ear is once accustomed to the sound, they are heard with indifference as vague, though excessive professions of respect*."

* Page 387.

Thus

Thus does our author teach us, in one instance at least, that the frequency of a crime deprives it of its malignity ; and that an action which is impious, if once or twice committed, ceases to be so, when committed a thousand times.

If impiety of language loses its immoral nature at this rate, then the profane sounds which are so shocking to the ears of all who are possessed of the least reverence for God, are perfectly harmless, because common. Let the Grammarian only give them a place in his list of interjections, and they have no more sin in them than the sound of *Atat* or *Apage*.

But is it not ungenerous to take advantage of an unguarded expression in an author ? It is so ; but I am persuaded this is not the case with our author. His deliberate meaning is expressed. For the rejection of Christian principles has ever been found to leave the mind destitute of every practical principle of piety : And though our author was far from meaning to shew us this in the passage before us, yet if he has inadvertently shewn it, a regard to truth and the best interests of mankind requires that his impiety should be exposed.

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The principle of genuine Christianity explained in the second part of this work, and traced into some of its salutary consequences in the five foregoing Sections, is ever productive of the most profound and the most sincere reverence of the Supreme Being. The views of guilt and ill desert of the Divine Holiness and the malignity of sin, which are learned from the cross of Christ, fail not to beget in the soul such ideas of God, attended also with such grateful, filial, and liberal sensations, as entirely exclude the impiety which Mr. Gibbon excuses. If we may take the liberty of using unmeaning expressions in conversation drawn from common life, the liberty of treating the DIVINITY in the same manner is far too bold, however freely this age of licentiousness may take it. The diminution of internal reverence thence arising is a sure effect of the licence; and such is the connection between the heart and the tongue, that the moment any man is observed to speak scripturally, to "become a new creature in Christ," however long the habit of impious language may have prevailed, it ceases at once, and in all his conversation he speaks with the utmost reverence of that Being whom he was wont in every sentence to blaspheme. The least regard for the Almighty in the heart is sure

to overcome this most common, but most heinous sin : And it is an instance of the extreme incapacity of moral discernment which must attend Infidelity, however great the intellectual faculty may be, that the learned Mr. Gibbon cannot see the sinfulness of a practice, which the merest babe in the school of Christ would feel with horror, and reject with the most rational abhorrence. The grand blessing of eternal life, which God gives in Christ to a believer, includes in it a divine nature and an holy conversation ; and the possessor feels he can never be sufficiently thankful and reverent in his regards to Jehovah. The happiness of heaven is described in the book of the Revelation, as replete with the lowest self-abasement in the most dignified spirits. Proud man, a worm of earth, is too haughty, too wise, too elevated, to imitate their lowliness.

Indeed the reasonableness of this humility is evident to a mind at all seasoned with divine truth. Who can express the praises of God ! The Bible is as full of his praise as the earth is of his dishonour. The contempt of his Majesty, with which this island abounds, is one of its most baleful symptoms. It is easy to say, they mean nothing by their oaths and curses ;

curfes; but here lies the very fin of the practice, that they dare, without confideration, sport with the name of God. Socrates is thus introduced by his scholars continually profaning the name of the heathen divinity, in all the impudence of the moft frivolous blasphemy. Νη Δις disgusts the ferious taſte in every page; and it may be ſafely ſaid, that the irreverence which it encourages is far too pernicious to be atoned for by all the good that, in a detached point of view, may be gathered from the Socratic leſſons.

I ſhall not inſult the reader's underſtanding by arguing the point before us any longer; I would rather appeal to his conſcience, referring him to the ſentiment of a ſincere believer of Scripture, no ways inferiour to our author, even in thoſe endowments in which he excels, and deſiring any man to judge intuitively, whether Gibbon's or Butler's judgment be more according to truth.

“ Tho' we ſhould ſuppoſe profane ſwearing,
 “ and in general, that kind of impiety now
 “ mentioned, to mean nothing, yet it implies a
 “ wanton diſregard and irreverence towards an
 “ infinite Being, our Creator; and is this as

“fuitable to the nature of man, as reverence
 “and dutiful submission of heart towards that
 “Almighty Being?” *

SECTION VII.

Lewdness.

IN the course of the history, making some remarks on the severity of the laws of Constantine against rapes, Mr. Gibbon mentions the gentle seduction which might persuade an unmarried woman, under the age of twenty-five, to leave the house of her parents, as one of “the most amiable weaknesses of human nature †.” It is foreign to my design to criticise the civil character of Constantine; no more need be quoted, therefore, than what directly relates to our purpose. Lewdness is in the MAN at least, our author being judge, a most amiable weakness! *O tempora! O mores!*

By this time the reader sees that the interests of morality would suffer in our author's hands as much as that of religion, should he favour the publick with as many lucubrations on that subject,

* See Butler's second Sermon on Human Nature.—† P. 440.

subject, as he has on the subject of religion. The connection between irreligion and immorality, and the importance of Christianity, with respect to its moral influence, would deserve a distinct treatise, it can here only have a few remarks.

Take a view of the egregious insincerity, the base hypocrisy of the Philosophers of antiquity in our author's own words; severe as I may be thought in my estimation of them, a severer censure of them will not be found in these sheets, than what our author has, though somewhat undesignedly, given of his favourite worthies.

“ Viewing, with a smile of pity and indulgence, the various errors of the vulgar, they
 “ diligently practised the ceremonies of their
 “ fathers, devoutly frequented the temples of
 “ the gods; and sometimes condescended to
 “ act a part on the theatre of superstition, they
 “ concealed the sentiments of an atheist under
 “ the sacerdotal robes. Reasoners of such a
 “ temper were scarcely inclined to wrangle
 “ about their respective modes of faith or of
 “ worship. It was indifferent to them what
 “ shape the folly of the multitude might chuse
 “ to

to assume; and they approached with the
 “ same inward contempt and the same external
 “ reverence the altars of the Lybian, the Olym-
 “ pian, or the Capitoline Jupiter.” *

The baseness of this conduct would strike any man’s mind in any concern but that of religion: and if this be of any concern at all, it is infinitely the most momentous: And in that degree insincerity must here be the most flagrant compound of impudence and hypocrisy. Truth and integrity are the ornaments of the creation; duplicity and prevarication, a reproach for which no genius and learning can atone; and the God of truth, when they are practised in religion, punishes them both in their necessary consequences, and *judicially*.

Habits of hypocrisy must warp the whole mind, darken and pervert the moral sense, and deeply corrupt the moral character throughout. He who could impose on his fellow-creatures in an affair of such moment as religion; and affront the Almighty by an hypocritical worship of idols, (for it would be extremely difficult for the most laborious system-maker of atheism
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* Page 32.—Scenes to be paralleled perhaps by the modern Deist’s receiving the Lord’s Supper to qualify for offices.

among them to eradicate the natural notion of an Almighty) and yet could excuse the want of truth by the idle pretence of an humane regard to the vulgar, could with the same ease look on a lewd seduction as an act of amiable humanity. The reverent regard for God being totally erased by repeated acts of hypocritical worship, men would give the rein to the most licentious appetites, and no fear of God would restrain them in their unbridled career.

It is immaterial to say here, that many of the Philosophers have been men of chaste and sober manners. Thanks to a particular bodily constitution, and the habits of study and reflection. The mind is in the mean-time as lewd and impure as the unawed corruption of nature can make it. The sober Mr. Hume (admitting him to have been such) will view lewdness without horror; and the sober Mr. Gibbon (for I am inclined to take it for granted he is so) will call a foul seduction an amiable weakness.

Not long since, within the circle of my observation, an unmarried woman, not "with brutal violence," but by "gentle seduction," was persuaded to go on board an armed vessel.

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Her afflicted father hears, gets himself rowed in a boat to the vessel, demands his daughter, is answered with horrible menaces, returns how distressed ! it will be a mercy if the consolations of piety may prevent his literal distraction !

Suppose now our author to be the father ; suppose him to foresee only the temporal evils most probably attendant on the seduction, profligate impudence, disease, poverty, shame, and an immature death ! Would he say the seducer or seducers were guilty of an amiable weakness ! Ought he not to learn the ethics of the despised Galilean, *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them* *. Shameful meanness ! that a Gentleman of such respectable literary talents can in this age of bold license and egregious profligacy, vindicate in effect the fashionable vices, as if the evils under which the land already groans needed the additional weight of his authority. But there is something divinely judicial in this matter. Men who *professed themselves wise became fools* ; and *because that when they knew God, they glorified him not as God ; for this cause God gave them up unto vile affections* †. Philosophic antiquity is eminently concerned in this censure.

Gibbon

* Matt. vii. 12.—† Rom. i.

Gibbon will tell us of Adrian*, and every school-boy knows from his Virgil and his Horace, what horrible lewdness prevailed among the polite Romans: St. Paul only tells us the judicial cause.

The reception of Christianity is, in its necessary consequences and in the gracious œconomy of the Divine Government, the reverse of all this. If TRUTH and CHASTITY forsake all the earth, they will yet dwell in a Christian. The life of Jesus, in his soul, is pure and holy; guile and hypocrisy are abhorrent from the whole image of God which in faith he received; and the love of God, while it lifts up the soul to celestial pleasures, subdues unchaste desires, and does alone,—let Philosophers laugh, while Christians can confute them by actions,—does alone, I say, what Philosophy pretends to, subdue the appetite to reason, because reason herself is subdued to God.

It will be no unprofitable speculation, considering the vast importance of this article even to human society, if to the candid reader it has appeared, that mere philosophy and mere morality cannot take care even of their own

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province;

province; they lead men either into actual profligacy, or, what is little better, into a vindication of it; but Christianity, at the same time that she moves in a sphere of true piety peculiarly her own, ever lends the most powerful aid to true morality, and reads efficacious lectures of truth and charity to mankind.

SECTION VIII.

Rationality.

MR. HUME's Philo observes, That "all religion is liable to abuses in civil society, except that of "the philosophical and rational kind*." Mr. Locke led the fashion in introducing a pompous parade of *reasoning* into religion; from that time a *rational* religion has been the cant term, with all who profess to be wiser than others. The proper humble subserviency of Reason to Christianity, as a very useful, but very submissive handmaid, has been discarded: The many who blindly follow men of superior penetration and capacity, think they have sufficiently answered the friends of Christian truth, by crying out, "Enthusiasm."

Men

* Hume's Dialogues, p. 244.

Men of no ability in reasoning, seek the praise of cool sense and solid sagacity, under the pretence of pleading the interests of reason. Infidels have not stopped where Mr. Locke did; he was at least a speculative believer, though he appears to know little or nothing of that divine faith which the Scripture describes*; from Locke down to Hume, that is to say, from a cold historical assent down to Atheism itself, or to what is much the same, there has been a gradual melancholy declension from evangelical simplicity; the last of the train had sagacity enough to discern† the advantage which the first undesignedly gave to Infidelity; and he has so compleatly displayed the triumphs of reason over religion, that she seems in his hands to be, what Grecian vanity feigned of Alexander, at a loss for more work, and groaning, because she has no more enemies to conquer.

Indeed the great progress of the human mind, during the two last centuries, in every branch of science has but too much flattered the *ignis fatuus* of what is called a rational religion. This world's process in all the arts of humanity has received such liberal advantage from the

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* See Section on Faith. —† Hume's Dialogues, p. 35.

improvements of reason, that no lover of mankind can fail to congratulate the times in this respect, and felicitate modern society, when compared with the ferocious miseries of antient ignorance. But the same love of mankind will induce him, if possessed of the smallest share of what the Apostle calls *spiritual understanding**, to lament that reason has impertinently intermeddled with the Gospel, and that with such overbearing sedulity, as to darken it more and more; and rivers of tears would not suffice to bewail the increase of moral misery, which, since Mr. Locke's time, has pervaded these kingdoms.

I am free to say, that the bold intrusions of reason have been a most powerful cause of our national depravity. Will the reader be pleased to examine carefully for himself 1 Cor. ii. and endeavour to divest himself of partiality, in fixing on the plain obvious sense of the whole? I might refer him to the Bible throughout; but that chapter peculiarly points out what I would offer as the real truth in this matter. If he cannot prevail on himself to do me this justice, I have no hope of his agreeing with me in the following account of *spirituality*;

* Coloss. i. 9.

tuality; nor shall I attempt to give him any other proof of its truth.

Man being dark and blind, with respect to God and the beauty of holiness, through the fall, a very considerable branch of that *eternal life which God gives him in his Son*, lies in the gift of the mind or spirit of Christ the Lord. Hence, and not from the best use of the most improved rational faculties, however useful they be in all things else, he has a proper perception of real Christianity. Had the wise of this world been possessed of the least degree of divine taste, they had never crucified the Lord of glory. A real knowledge of, and reliance on Christ crucified, is only this way attained. The reason of man, in his present depraved state, is not only not friendly, but is most directly inimical to this Spirit of God. All the knowledge called rational, must be deduced from the sources of sensation and reflection, as Mr. Locke, in his admirable treatise on the Human Understanding, has demonstrated; simple ideas being the ultimate sources. Where there is no perceptive organ, there no art can educe them. The blind can by no means form an idea of colours, nor the deaf of sounds. The perceptive faculty, which relates to the apprehension
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of the real Gospel, is of the same kind, and has the same properties, as any man, who both understands Locke's Treatise and the real Gospel, may satisfy himself. It gives him new ideas of the glory of God and of moral beauty; in short, of every thing which enters into the genius of the Gospel. Like other ideas and other knowledge, deduced from the perception of the agreement and disagreement of ideas, this divine taste, and all the knowledge deduced from it, may be strengthened by exercise, and be impaired by sloth, but must itself be the direct gift of heaven. The Spirit of Christ, thus imparted, communicates a new world of ideas, which are *foolishness* unto the natural man; the man of mere nature and mere reason*, inexplicable to others as the ways of the incomprehensible God himself†; or, as one man's ideas must be to another, destitute of his identical spirit‡. Hence alone we can account for the enmity which *natural* men have against the Gospel, and will have, until they be renewed. Yet does this spiritual faculty by no means weaken any of the natural powers of man, or supersede their true use and efficacy; on the contrary, he that is *spiritual judgeth all things*:

* 1 Cor. ii. 14.—† 1 Cor. ii. 16.—‡ 1 Cor. ii. 11.

things *: The removal of prejudices, and the conquest of passions which it imparts, must assist and strengthen the rational faculty, even in those things which are reason's province, at the same time that the spiritual faculty itself remains a perfect mystery to those who are merely possessed of the rational.—*He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man* *.

The evidence, by which every man ought to judge himself, whether he be possessed of this spiritual perception, on which all happiness and eternal life depends, is the conformity of his experience with the written word. This is sufficient to discriminate him from a mere enthusiast, or one who imagines, as many have done, that he is guided by the Spirit of God, when he is not.

If these views be said to be extremely abhorrent from the prevailing spirit of the times, it is confessed, with sorrow and regret, that they are. No consequence however it is apprehended can hence be deduced but this, that we are fallen very much from real Christianity.

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* 1 Cor. ii. 15. See Edwards's Treatise on the Religious Affections.

I will now be easy, in a summary way, to answer Mr. Locke's account of the provinces of faith and reason, and of enthusiasm, in these four observations.

1. He greatly mistakes the sense of that text, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him* *. The chapter to which the reader's attention has been earnestly solicited, and of which these words are a part, forbids us to understand them with Mr. Locke of the revelations made to St. Paul in his miraculous extasy, and lead us entirely to understand them of those ordinary, but precious sensations and discoveries communicated to every believer in every age; without the least reference to those extraordinary, but far less precious, gifts of the Holy Spirit confined to the primitive times.

2. His account of the distinct provinces of faith and reason is insidious and weak, because he understands by faith nothing of that divine quality, which apprehends Christ alone for salvation, and to which so much is constantly ascribed in Scripture. Doubtless in this, reason

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* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

may and ought to exercise herself in determining the evidences of revelation in general, as well as in many circumstances relating to the doctrines of Scripture that might be mentioned; and this a natural man may do, notwithstanding his spiritual blindness, just as Professor Saunderson, though blind, might give excellent lectures on light and colours. But the true nature itself of Gospel-truth, grace, and glory, and all the enjoyment, and all the holiness thence arising, a natural man, so remaining, must continue destitute of to eternity.

3. His whole account of Enthusiasm is obviated in a word. When men cannot prove their supposed spiritual experience to be conformable to the written word, in that case they may, and ought to be, deemed Enthusiasts.

4. He allows good men may sometimes be supernaturally assisted: The account we have given shews that they ALWAYS are so; not they, but Christ *dwelling* in them*. It is true they cannot give any other evidence to others, that they are so, but what results from the bright emanation of their holy lives, joined to their

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simple

* Gal. ii. 20.

simple testimony, and to the proof which they bring from the Scripture of these things; and it is sufficient, and let me add very rational, encouragement to any man to seek for the same unspeakable blessings, though he as yet found himself destitute of them, that God *gives the Holy Spirit to them that ask him. They that ask shall have, they that seek shall find, to them that knock it shall be opened**. In the mean-time the extravagant applauses bestowed on the rational, have entirely jostled out of our religious system the *spiritual* powers; and so specious and plausible is the deceit, that even many good men do much impede their spiritual progress by their excessive leaning to what is called rational in religion. This has once demolished the simplicity of truth in the Anglican Church; and now that a partial revival of truth has taken place, it will be well for us, if it do not at least check the progress of it in this Isle. Let reason be kept to her province, be respected, cherished, and encouraged in it by every method. But let her not pretend to incorporate with spirituality itself, though she may judge of the circumstances that relate to it. So low are we fallen in this respect, that, when the operations of the spirit are named, men seem scarce

* Matthew vii. 7.

scarce to think of any other operations as possible, but the miraculous. The concessions of Locke to Infidels have given them advantages, which they prosecute with merciless rigour. If an emphasis of obstinacy in guarding against the specious snare of rationality has appeared in what has been said, let it be laid to the account of the author's vehemence of jealousy; let his reasonings, however, be candidly weighed, and let it be considered after all, whether the least diminution of the honour justly due to reason, or the least invasion of her rights, has been incurred by this account of an additional spiritual faculty, any more than the addition of the rational faculty is any diminution of the just honour, or any invasion of the rights of the animal nature.

S E C T I O N IX.

The Church.

BY this time the attentive reader may think it necessary, that we should define what we mean by the word *Church*, in its Scripture-sense, in order to ascertain with still greater precision what is Christianity, and to rescue it

by a just separation from the disgrace it has ever sustained from the hand of infidelity.

The Church of Christ consists of those, and *only* those, who are *spiritually* united to Jesus Christ as their Prophet, Priest, and King, or to say all in a word, their SAVIOUR, and through him to God the Father by an everlasting covenant. The spirituality of this union respects the communication of his spirit as a principle of heavenly life, superadded to all that is merely rational*, not in the least weakening any one common principle of humanity, but strengthening and rectifying them all. This heavenly life begins on earth, and is consummated only in heaven. God himself is the giver of this life; and the merit for the sake of which he confers it, as well as the medium through which it is conveyed, is the propitiation of his only-begotten Son†. Human merit being thus totally excluded, and every member of the church being a child of wrath by nature, and dead in trespasses and sins as others‡, there is no way in the world conceivable of obtaining and enjoying eternal life, but that of the faith which has been described§, and which must issue in a course of
practice

* Sect. viii. — † Part ii. — ‡ Eph. ii. 3. — § Sect. i.

practice radically distinct from mere morality *, with a special and determinate reference to a future state of blissful immortality †. We now behold a living member of Christ's body, holding fast the head, and deriving spiritual nourishment from him for the maintenance of this practical plan as really and as vitally, as the members of the human body derive the support of the animal œconomy from the head. Hence toward God arises that awful and habitual reverence of heart; toward himself, that purity and chastity of affection; and toward his neighbour, that disinterested benevolence equally abstracted from the love of praise or of gain, which mark him as a singular being in the eyes of mankind ‡, and, to crown all, excites their disgust by a spirituality, not contrary to, but far above all that is merely rational in man §. This is the Church; but the Spirit of Christ has not left her to drive at random from wave to wave of fancied illumination, without an helm. The Scripture guides each member in every spiritual movement, and affords a sufficient directory to secure him from enthusiasm, and to discriminate his path to glory from the walk of all that delusive inspiration, which, whether its origin
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* Sect. ii.—† Sect. iii.—‡ Sect. iv. v. vi. and vii.—§ Sect. viii.

be from man or from Satan, pretends to be from God. Faith, hope, and charity are real spiritual qualities, and as they grow only out of real union with Jesus, so they will not incorporate with any enthusiasm whatever.

If this be a scriptural and precise idea of the Church, the intelligent reader will be able to distinguish the holy city, as Mr. Gibbon scornfully calls her*, from all strangers, who may claim an interest in her privileges. He will not look for Christianity in any national or congregational Churches, merely as such. He will view these as institutions necessary for the present course of things; but neither these, nor the endless motley-mixture of heresies, dissensions, and separations that have obtained in the Christian world, will distract his mind in the search of the real Church. Where Christ is really trusted in, and really loved, and where the scriptural marks of unfeigned attachment to him exist, there is the Church. A thousand circumstances of diversity prevent not the union of those, in whom resides the same simple spirituality; nor do a thousand circumstances of agreement unite in fellowship those

* Page 3 of his Vindication.

those who are *spiritual* with those who are *natural* *.

Had Mr. Gibbon understood this, he had deprived himself of all that pleasure, which the recital of the evils natural and moral occasioned by nominal Christians, evidently affords him. Not a shadow of real disgrace would fall on the spotless spouse of Christ from all the abominations of harlots. The truth is, all who are not of the Church are Infidels, as really so as Bolingbroke or Hume. Christianity has no real connection with their follies and vices, because they are not united to her head by faith; and it no more concerns her to obviate the scandals they occasion, than those occasioned by Mahometans or Pagans.

The discerning reader will see to what a length of consequences these thoughts may be extended. A single instance may give him a clear idea of what I mean. It gives Mr. Gibbon pain, that Christians, whom he would rob of every other glory, should possess the peculiar glory of suffering. After taking great pains to shew how little their sufferings were, he comforts himself with the thought, that
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* 1 Cor. ii.

the Christians, in the course of their intestine dissensions, have inflicted far greater severities on each other, than they had experienced from the zeal of Infidels*.

In truth, the persecutions in France, in Spain, in Germany, in the Netherlands, and in England, which, at different times, have deluged those countries with rivers of blood, were additional instances of the malice of infidelity against the Church of Christ, and ought not, even in imagination, to be classed under another head of events. Did the persecutors indeed regard the spiritual new birth, faith in Jesus alone for salvation, and the other scriptural marks of the Church? Did they not in fact deride these things as much as Dioclesian or Julian could do, and did they not hate those who loved them as such? What if some forms of nominal Christianity seem to give them another aspect? What do they prove, but that Satan teaches his children in the progress of the world an hypocrisy more and more refined, while he directs them still to carry on the same interest; and pride, love of the world, and enmity against the kingdom of Christ are as discernible as ever in his subjects?

The

* Page 585.

The Church then has ever been in general the suffering party in the world. No instance can be given of such malicious persecution carried on, sometimes with open fury, at other times with refined disguises, against any set of men as against real Christians. The spouse of Christ may be traced, as by the other marks laid down, so by this of suffering, from age to age. The streams of blood, and the taunts of reproach, distinguish her most evidently, and shew that she has not a friend upon earth : Her consolation is, her friend is above, and because he lives she shall live also*. Her head suffered more than heart can conceive, while on earth, and she must mark her course of conformity to him, by suffering till *God wipe away all tears from her eyes.*

It is not hard for a lover of evangelical truth to trace historically this Church of Christ from the beginning of time to the present. From the blood of Abel let us carry down our eyes through the cruel bondage of Egypt to the sufferings of the Prophets, who successively adorned the Church. Behold Antiochus Epiphanes glutted with the blood of the Macchabees, and you still see the Church, even be-

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fore

* John xiv. 19.

fore the incarnation of Jesus, living in dependence upon him, and substantially the same as the Church since his time, though under a darker dispensation. It was indeed a dull season of the Church when Jesus visited the earth in human form; but Simeon, Anna, Cornelius, and probably several more, still testified, that God had a Church upon earth. The brightness of the three first centuries of Christianity points her out with a splendour which needs no faint description of mine. Through the following centuries to the twelfth, though with decreasing splendour, yet still the children of the Church are discoverable like bright luminaries amidst the growing darkness of Antichrist.

“A crowd of daring fanatics from the twelfth to the sixteenth century assumed the popular character of reformers*.” Thus fastidiously speaks our author. The pious Waldo of Lyons, I suppose, is one of them, who, leaving his house and goods, devoted himself wholly to the profession of the Gospel, and took care to have the writings of the Prophets and Apostles translated into the vulgar tongue†. Grossthead, Bishop of Lincoln, is another who has

* Page 586.—† See Newton on the Phrophecies, vol. iii. p. 176.

has merited the illiberal appellation for his honest labours in defence of religious liberty against the encroachments of Popery in the thirteenth century. Walter Lollard, burnt alive at Cologne, is another ; and John Wickliffe, whose name will remain fragrant to the latest posterity, is, it seems, in Mr. Gibbon's eyes, a daring fanatic ; and the noble Baron of Cobham, in the fifteenth, is honoured with the same goodly epithet. John Hufs and Jerome of Prague, what men were these ! What a testimony did even a learned Papist give of the latter ! daring fanatics a learned Modern esteems them. And how difficult will it be for him to clear himself of indirectly accusing, in the same manner, the magnanimous Luther, the meek Melancthon, and the whole tribe of German and British reformers, to whom, under God, we owe so much at this day ! Mr. Gibbon is beyond all doubt learned, sagacious, and discerning ; but he ought not, like another Pope, to arrogate to himself an infallibility of judgment : Nothing short of this can vindicate such positive stigmas against whole bodies of men. The Church, ever praised be her Head ! still subsists in various parts of the world, and answers the calumnies of enemies by faith, meekness, patience, beneficence, and prayer.

This is the Church: What her enemies are, their own enmity declares. But the Gates of hell shall never prevail against her: So promises her Lord. Thus far his words are made good; the Church is neither reasoned nor persecuted out of the world; what he has done already in his indulgent providence, is an earnest of what he will do to the end of time.

SECTION X.

The progress of Christianity.

THOUGH Mr. Gibbon owns, in words, that "it was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and to the ruling providence of its great author*," yet nothing is more evident than this, that the whole energy of his fifteenth chapter is directed to establish positions, tending to account for its progress by methods merely human. What consequences subversive of its divine authority would thence be deduced, its enemies will tell with pleasure. Whether our author really meant to furnish them with the materials of this malignant triumph, is referred to his own conscience. But it behoves every friend of mankind,

* Page 450.

mankind, who loves the Gospel, to oppose what is inimical to it, whether designedly so or not.

It will be necessary then to shew (what will now need only a few words to illustrate, but which it was a principal object of these sheets to establish) the total insufficiency of his projected methods of propagating Christianity; and that even "the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself, and the ruling providence of its great author," though surely of great importance, needed also the addition of another capital mean for the successful propagation of the Gospel.

And here I would premise, that there are two cases, and two seasons, which relate to this subject, extremely necessary to be distinguished, in order to elucidate its nature, which Mr. Gibbon has all along confounded, and thence has rendered the whole chapter under consideration, ambiguous and insidious to the last degree. The case of a general profession of Christianity, grounded on speculative belief, education, or tradition, but void of energetic faith, and productive of no moral and spiritual renovation of nature, ought
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ever to be distinguished from the case of the real CHURCH of Christ, consisting of living members of his body, influenced by his SPIRIT, possessed of the real faith and holiness of the Gospel, and by consequence expressing in their lives the doctrines and precepts of the New Testament.

He who would enquire into the causes of the propagation of Christianity, can never do justice to his subject, nor so much as give a clear idea of the object before him, except he define, whether he means the first or the last of these cases. They are widely distinct from one another. Even modern Judaism and Pagan idolatry are not so different in their nature, as these two considerations. For there may be, and often is, much of the first, where there is none at all, or very little, of the second.

Two seasons also must be carefully distinguished; and it ought to be considered, whether we have in view the first extensive propagation of Christianity by the preaching of the primitive teachers, till their numbers became considerable in the empire, or the second still more extensive propagation of it, after Churches were formed, and some scope was given for
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the exercise of human power and policy in this work. The neglect of the first distinction would seem to indicate an extreme ignorance of the nature of the Gospel, which must be taken into consideration by every one, who undertakes fairly to account for its propagation. And the neglect of the second seems to betray the want of candour, as that of the former does the want of discernment.

1. It has been too largely shewn by many divines, to need any repetition, how impossible it was that such a religion as that of Jesus, so extremely persecuted as it certainly was*, under such a concurrence of disadvantages, internal and external, could ever, had it been false, have overcome the deep-rooted prejudices of idolatry, and have brought so large a part of mankind, even to the profession abstracted from the vital obedience of Jesus. The first case is that which, under this head, will alone engage our attention. It is easy to account for the rapid progress of any party, good or bad, after it has once made itself respectable or formidable enough to engage the attention of mankind. The difficulty is, how to account for the first success of the Gospel.

Conceive

* See part i. section last.

Conceive twelve illiterate fishermen or mechanics, aided by seventy assistants, beginning at Jerusalem to spread the religion of their despised and crucified Master among the Jews, his virulent enemies, and among the Gentiles, whose religion and whose manners they condemn in the gross. The malignity of Infidels may dwell with satisfaction on the pious frauds, the religious crusades, and the horrible persecutions, which, in after-ages, were made use of to propagate, not Christianity surely, but the Christian name : But this does not at all affect our subject ; for if the distinction of seasons be steadily kept in view, the necessity of the truth of the Gospel will be evident. Fictitious miracles could never have counter-ailed such powerful opposition. They must have been stifled in the birth : The miracles must have been true, known and felt to be true, or even the bare profession of so obnoxious a religion could not have obtained among mankind.

Our author thinks* the multiplicity of sects, into which the Christian world was divided, had its influence in propagating the Gospel. Quite the reverse seems the judgment of unbiased

* Page 462.

classified and arranged the anomalous tribes of Barbarians in the civil part of his history, in the discovery of causes merely human, that may account for the rapid progress of the Gospel. His invention was surely distressed, when he threw out the zeal of the Christians against idolatry, as one of these causes. The distinction of seasons, which perpetually calls for our attention, demonstrates this. The second rapid propagation of Christ's religion may be conceived to have been assisted by this medium. In after-ages the zeal of Charlemagne against idolatry tended, no doubt, to spread the Christian name at least among the stubborn Saxons, and many instances of a more recent date might be produced. But what is this to the first propagation of the Gospel through the Roman Empire in the three first centuries, without the least aid of civil power? That which is already propagated, always has, within itself, energetic causes of a propagation still more extensive, but how to propagate at all, *hic labor, hoc opus est.*

Let us place before our eyes the first beginnings of the Gospel, as stated in the history of the Acts, and as allowed of necessity by all acquainted with antient history. Will any
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man say, that the fervent zeal of the Apostles against idolatry had, in itself, the least tendency to propagate the faith? Do men love to have their favourite passions openly opposed? Is that the way to win the heart? Did the Jesuits in the East make their converts by this method? Did not artifice, equivocation, and unwarrantable compliances mark their character and conduct? This then is so far from having been an human cause of the success of Christianity, that it only shews in a stronger light the power of those divine causes, which alone can account for it.

We are told, that the belief of the Millennium, and the near approach of the end of the world, had a mighty influence*. It has already been shewn, that the description of the Millennium, in carnal images, was intended to convey spiritual ideas; nor were the first Christians so unacquainted with the genius of Scripture, as to misunderstand this matter: It may be added, none who deserve the name of Christians in that or in any age, are moved in the choice of their religion by motives of a merely wordly nature. If some of the first Christians might have imagined the second coming of

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Christ

* Page 471.

Christ to be at hand, St. Paul, in the second chapter of the second epistle to the Thessalonians, fully obviated the mistake: And St. John's Apocalypse, by deducing a long period of prophetic events from his own time to the end of the world, necessarily threw it back to a very distant period in the eyes of all Christians. The imagination is easily seduced to countenance whatever we are much inclined to; but the sacred writings (the most material evidences surely in this affair) say nothing of such an universal belief among Christians as our author speaks of. I recollect only the mistake of the Thessalonians, and this we have seen was presently obviated. The directions to patience, and to much long-suffering, the appointment of successive pastors in the Churches, and the intimations given of so many events which must require a course of time, point out to Christians no such speedy extinction of the world. Clement, in his epistle to the Corinthians, suggests, I think, no such idea, which he would scarce have failed to do, of an event so interesting, and believed so near. Cyprian constantly encourages the Martyrs with no other arguments than those which a good man would use in
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our days: And St. Austin*, in a letter to Hefychius, breathes the same language, confessing, with his usual candour, his entire ignorance of the time of our Lord's second coming.

On the whole, we seem more obliged to our author's imagination, than to any historical discernment of his, for this new cause of the success of the Gospel.

“ But the fear of eternal punishment denounced against unbelievers might influence much the minds of men in their first reception of the Gospel †.” Let even Hume answer our author, and that in the most solid manner: “ Consider, I beseech you, the attachment which we have to present things, and the little concern which we discover for objects so remote and uncertain ‡.” Place then hell-fire, but invisible, on the one hand, and on the other the visible tortures of various kinds which have been shewn, I think unanswerably, to attend Christianity; whether would naturally operate most, is obvious to understand.

And

* Augustini Opera, vol. i. p. 350. — † Page 474. —

‡ Hume's Dialogues, p. 245.

And the effect of the virtues of the first Christians, and of their ecclesiastical polity, is liable to the same objections which have been considered in other instances. Admit their effect to have been even greater than Mr. Gibbon would describe them. But then what caused these first Christians, and virtuous Christians too? What gave rise to so strong an ecclesiastical polity? His subordinate causes come evidently too late to do their master's business.

“The alms* of the first Christians” might make a few hypocrites, but their pecuniary abilities were too narrow, and the disadvantages of violent persecution were too discouraging, to give any force to the consideration deserving the attention of a reasonable man: But it is a bold thing to say, that such a spirit of incredulity had taken place in the polite world, that “an object much less-deserving than Christianity, “would have been sufficient to fill the vacant “place in their hearts.” †

For bath a nation changed their gods, which are yet no gods? Are old habits so soon worn out? Let incredulity be ever so strong in the gentleman, the peasant will still adhere to his superstitious

* Page 498.—† Page 504.

stitious attachments. If the change from Idolatry to Christianity was so easy, why was it not before attempted? What evidence is there that, had not Christianity appeared, all the learning of Philosophers, and all the power of Emperors would have made any more alteration in the prevailing religious systems since the Christian æra than they did before*. Indeed the increase of Infidelity, whilst it left the Pagan gentry as much *hypocritically* addicted to the common superstitions as the vulgar were *sincerely*, rendered them less susceptible of that fair evidence which Christianity offers. So easy a thing is it to turn arguments, which derive all their strength from fancy, against the inventor; and so contemptible does the sagacity of a great man appear, when it is employed against the cause of heaven!

2. It is, I hope, apparent, that nothing that has hitherto been laid before the reader will account for this amazing fact, the establishment of the CHURCH in such a world as this. The case of real Christians requires a distinct consideration: If miracles, prophecies, and internal evidence would account for the propagation of professional Christianity, they cannot, however,

* See Prof. Bullet's History of the Establishment of Christianity.

however, create the real CHURCH. This is the fact: There were in the primitive times, and it is not difficult to shew from the lights of history, that there ever have been since, a number of persons powerfully distinguished from all the world in their views, affections, and conduct, so singular that they evidently appear to be possessed with a principle of action and a sensation peculiar to themselves. They love the LORD GOD; their zeal in his service; their delight in his ways; and their course of suffering for his honour demonstrate, that it is not merely for the advantages attendant on religion, but for their religion itself, that they practice its precepts. They have a peculiar attachment to Jesus Christ, and own that it is by a vital connection with him only, the nature of which they themselves are far from being able to explain, that they enjoy this new life. The world may be pleased to call it an enthusiastical, they, according to scriptural phraseology, call it a spiritual life, because they believe it begun, continued, and carried on by the Spirit of God; and they have this evidence of the truth of what they affirm, that they find every power of nature and mere reason totally incompetent to produce this life. On the contrary, they feel themselves apostate, guilty, corrupt, undone

done sinners: They seek not their own glory; they value not human praise; they are low enough in their own eyes to be obliged to mere grace for all their happiness, and to confess that ruin is their desert. They adore the wisdom, the grace, and the love of God exhibited in the redemption through Jesus Christ. His merit and death form their sole title to glory, and sole relief of conscience. The love of Christ constrains them to live righteously, soberly, and godly. That virtue to which Philosophy pretends, is theirs in reality. Abstracted from the world in taste and spirit, they yet demonstrate, that they love all men in sincerity. Pride and ostentation, which so evidently mark and stain the character of other sufferers, appear not in the Christian sufferer: His patience is humble, meek, and serene; and he has that within, which is the never-failing spring of his singular virtue and supreme delight, an hope full of immortality. In fine, he is in this distinct from all the world, as distinct from others who yet call themselves Christians, as from all the religionists that ever lived, that he lives, and hopes, and glories, not in any thing done or suffered by himself, but while he views himself as undeserving as any other, he lives, and hopes, and rejoices

in the righteousness and infinite merit of another, which becomes his only by imputation, and forms the basis of his comfort, the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever.

. This is the CHRISTIAN: This is what the Apostles laboured to propagate: And a Phænomenon so rare, and I will add so glorious, must have a singular cause. It will be evident to any man capable of considering the subject, that this is a production to which the most improved faculties of the human mind are unequal. The most that can be effected by human resolutions is, a constrained obedience. Self lies at the bottom. The love of honour will urge a man to do and suffer many things with vigour and fortitude: But what will he do, when selfish motives are removed, and pure Love is made the predominant principle? The least knowledge of human nature will enable any man to see, that abstracted from pride, ostentation, or some selfish and wordly motive, Cato had been no more than the vulgar in his virtue.

Turn we to the Scriptures for the discovery of a cause. "It is easy," say many, "to see there the true cause. The discovery of a future

ture state of rewards and punishments influences the Christian." It is granted, that self-love has its place in the Christian scheme, but then it is not predominant. Love is the monarch in all her œconomy. The two principles of hope and fear will account for much vigour and activity in some tempers, but not at all for that pleasant, free, joyful obedience of humble love, mortified from all that is worldly and all that is vain-glorious, and giving glory to God and shame to man, from the heart. But the fact we have stated is of this kind; and nothing is more evident than that this is the constant Scripture-character of a Christian.

Let the same book, which describes the character, explain the cause. *No man can say, that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God, that we might know the things which are freely given unto us of God. We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him. Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but*

my Father, which is in heaven. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, which giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. If ye being evil know how to give good things to your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?

The sole adequate cause of the successful propagation of the Gospel is according to the Scriptures, the Holy Ghost. It will be well if his agency, in these polite and rational days, be thought to deserve a moment's attention. Yet it is evident that there must be some cause for this wonderful Phænomenon. I shall not disgust the rational world by supposing the agency of any supernatural Being in the affair, but that of the great author of nature. Any spirit inimical to him could not, and any spirit obedient to his authority would not produce a character of such goodness, but under his authority, and by a power derived from himself. Even miracles cannot change the heart, whatever effect they may have on the judgment; and the ruling providence of God implying only an external government does not influence the will, as facts abundantly testify. All that is rational and human is totally unequal to the task; nay, perhaps, the most

most sensible of mankind, should they deign to honour these sheets with their inspection, can scarce bear the idea of a real Christian with patience. There is, there is an energy* more than human, which produces this character, and it remains that this must be the INFLUENCE OF THE HOLY GHOST.

The reader, who will allow himself seriously to weigh this subject, may see that nothing short of this could constitute one *real Christian*, in this or in any other age of the Church. Let him consider, whether it is even possible for mere man to invent such doctrines, much less to propagate them with any success in a world like this †. A number of men possessed of a sixth sense, of which we had not the least idea, would find but few brought over to their opinion, that they were possessed of such a sensation.

* See Section on Rationality.

† Men who have formed their religious sentiments from tradition, education, or mere rationality, will naturally fall into views not radically distinct from those of other Religionists, Pagan, Mahometan, or Philosophical, and still call themselves Christians; but a discovery of real Christianity will enable any man to see it to be totally distinct in its whole nature from all religions in the world; and to such and such only it will appear that a religion which completely debases self, and magnifies God alone, could not originate from man, nor could ever have been propagated by mere man: It must have proceeded from God, and have made its way into the hearts of men by an influence purely divine.

tion. Their pretensions would be misconstrued into pride or folly : But those whom the Most High should endow with the same sensation would easily believe. The application is obvious,

Thus we have a simple and obvious proof of the truth of Christianity. I fear, indeed, it will weigh but little with those who love not the real Gospel. The generality will say, " at this rate the majority of those who call themselves Christians, do not even know their own religion." It is devoutly to be wished, that this were not the case ; that even many who have written ably in defence of Christianity, had themselves known its nature. Much of the advantage which Deism has gained, had then been prevented ; we should have had more of the experimental proof. That Scripture had been better known, *he that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself**. Sceptical doubts will vanish before stubborn facts ; were the Gospel itself understood, little time need be spent on its evidences. One sight of the sun is sufficient to point out its glorious Author. In all things else experience is allowed to be the best school-master ; in religion only it is called *Enthusiasm*.

* 1 John v. 10.

S E C T I O N XI.

Cause of the Enmity against Christianity.

IN the former part of his sixteenth chapter, our author, in a long apparatus of criticism, endeavours to investigate the cause why Christianity was so much persecuted by the Roman Emperors. It evidently strikes his mind, that there must be some powerful cause that could produce so singular an exception to the tolerating genius of antient Polytheism : And never did the opposition between subjects peculiarly Christian, and those which are merely rational, appear in a more conspicuous point of view than on this occasion. That sagacity, which has hitherto investigated with such judgment and precision the causes of the decline of Roman greatness, and which has afforded a pleasing prospect of farther displays * to every rational lover of history, seems *here* to be devoid of even the first elements of the subject. He sees that it is something wonderful, that the Jew, as singular as the Christian in many respects, should yet escape that ferocity of religious persecution, which fell with such weight on

* The greater part of this work was written before the publication of our author's second and third volumes.

on those whom they contemptuously called the sect of the Nazarenes. What is in his eyes to account for this astonishing diversity? The Jews were a *nation*, the Christians were a sect: And of what effect can so slight a distinction as this be to account for the rage of persecution, which vexed the Church for 300 years almost without ceasing?

I doubt not but every real Christian is beforehand with our author in giving the true account of this matter. It were an insult on the meanest *spiritual* understanding, to undertake in form to acquaint them with it. *If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Cain was of that wicked one, and slew his brother, and wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* This is a very simple account of the whole matter. Mankind are in a state of guilt, apostacy, and corruption; their minds are enmity itself against God*: His holy nature, that is himself, is the object of their aversion.

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* Rom. viii. 7.

He found it so experimentally, when it pleased him to become manifest in the flesh *, though for the most benevolent purpose that can be conceived. His divine nature was impassive; his human nature was capable of suffering, and it did suffer to a degree beyond all description. In proportion as any of his regenerate children partake of his Spirit, they are exposed to his sufferings. The doctrines of grace, of justification, of faith, of holiness, of this world and the next, which Christianity reveals, are diametrically opposite to all that any other religion devises, or any philosophy invented. The world will bear, and even in some circumstances admire, certain forms and shadows of goodness. Real goodness itself, all that are of the world will hate, will persecute with unremitted rancour: For other animosities, time and various lenient circumstances will administer a cure: Godliness must be hated by the world for ever: Satan, its God, will ever aid his subjects in the prosecution of the quarrel, and no man can escape the infection, except he become a new creature. Even the virtues of the world are full as hostile to the Gospel as its grossest vices: For it condemns all the glory as well as all the shame of the world; and the reader

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who

* 1 Tim. iii. 16

who has been at the pains to consider the nature of Christ's religion, as delineated above, and to view in contrast the spirit of the world, will need no farther illustration of this subject.

The Roman persecutions form but a small part of ecclesiastical history, which may hence be illustrated. The rage of Philip II. had no other origin: And Mr. Gibbon will allow us to say, that Rome Papal has been as bloody as Rome Pagan. In short, with whatever diversity of circumstances, wherever we see the peculiarly Christian principles operating among mankind, there we see the Church, and there we see it persecuted; and the persecutors, whatever they call themselves, form, in Scripture language, *the world*.

It is true, in our days, the enmity of man's mind against holiness has less scope of persecution than ever. But let the restraints of civil government be once removed, and torrents of Christian blood would flow as freely as ever. Human nature is not changed. Persecution is now confined to the tongue and the pen. Mr. Gibbon's unjust censures of the primitive Christians, which in the first part have been considered, originate from the enmity of human nature

nature against the Gospel. That lives and will live in all whose hearts are not *christened*, so to speak ; though in some there is a natural generosity of temper that may prevent its malevolent exertions in torture and blood ; and if Mr. Gibbon insists that this is his case, I am by no means disposed to dispute it.

By this time, it is hoped, this Gentleman and his admirers may understand the spirit of these sheets. Personal ill-will, envy of his fame, desire of detracting from the praises so justly attributed to his merits, or even the most distant wish to give him pain, form no part of the design. Oppressed or despised Christianity has ever had some advocates : If the writer of this be a feeble one, he is at least sincere. Enthusiast ! No matter : But yet he knows, that to *call names* is *not to reason* ; nor would he be hence deterred from vindicating what he takes to be the real Gospel, desirous of no arms but those of argument, and convinced that Mr. Gibbon's account of the primitive Christians must have arisen from the enmity of human nature, which has in this case betrayed his judgment.

It is not singularity, as such, that excites this enmity. The modern Dissenters, I mean only those who have deviated from the Gospel, may be as tenacious as they please of their sectarian peculiarities, without giving the least offence; and the Churchman may, with rigid exactness, obey his Diocesan, and regulate his ecclesiastical conduct by the Rubric; but if he preach, and feel, and live the Gospel, he will be severely censured by the world: Both these cases are well known in England; and they illustrate, in opposition to our author, that *national* establishments will not secure real Christians from that persecution from which the unchristian sectaries will be exempt. And I seriously believe, had the nation of the Jews been wholly evangelized, and the Christian sect become in spirit and conduct like the Jewish nation, the tables had been reversed; the distinction between a nation and a sect had proved frivolous in experience, the Christians had been tolerated, and the Jews had felt the whole weight of persecution.

SECTION

SECTION XII.

Hume.

THE principles of revealed religion have been considered, and the futility of Mr. Gibbon's attempt against them has been exposed by arguments drawn from the nature of Christianity itself. "But is there not such a thing as natural religion; or, to speak more intelligibly, can we see nothing by the light of nature concerning God and our duty?"

I answer, Yes; and St. Paul tells us how much. All that Metaphysicians have investigated on this head, may be reduced to these two sentences; *The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse* *. And when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts; their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean-while accusing, or else excusing one another. †

Thus,

* Rom. i. 20.—† Rom. ii. 15.

Thus, St. Paul being judge, *God has not left himself without witness*, even in the natural world. The works of creation speak to us from *without*; and the moral nature, which he has given us, speaks to us from *within*. In conjunction they declare his Being and Sovereign authority, his power, wisdom, and goodness, his equitable government, and the accountability of the human race for all their moral conduct before him. And this is the utmost stretch of natural religion, an intuitive feeling rather than the result of any laborious investigation. Strong and deep in its nature, though confused and indeterminate in its degree, it lays, however, all mankind under a formal obligation of obedience, because all mankind feel its force, and of necessity acquiesce in its authority, while they strive in vain to reason away its validity. Its importance in the Christian scheme, that admirable reasoner St. Paul himself explains in the Epistle to the Romans. Aware what Reason could do, and what she could not do, he begins with natural religion, as a basis not of justification and comfort, but of despair and condemnation. Conscience alone, of all the moral powers of man, is not ruined by the fall, but as she must be a torment, not a relief to

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an *awakened* mind, free room and scope are hence afforded for the display of that conviction of sin, and of that imputed merit of Jesus, by which the penitent sinner may be fully restored to the divine favour, and enriched for ever.—But this belongs to revealed religion. And we cannot now follow him in the delightful subject; we may remain about the avenues, for a virulent enemy of all goodness stops us in the passage, and following the *rational* scent of Mr. Locke*, who first unhappily gave Reason leave to intrude herself into the secrets of Christianity, keeps her in full employ, till she has demolished all, both natural and revealed religion.

In his dialogues concerning natural religion, we have the substance of all his sceptical essays; and notwithstanding his declaration at the close in favour of Cleanthes, the natural religionist, it is evident from the whole tenour of the book, and still more so from the entire scepticism of his former publications, that Philo is his favourite. Sincerity constitutes no part of a philosopher's virtue.

He spends many nugatory pages on the natural attributes of God, and labours hard to
prove,

* Hume's dialogues, p. 35.

prove, by a variety of childish imaginations at least, if not of arguments, that one scheme of Godhead is as good as another, with a view to reduce Polytheism, Spinozism, Christianity, and all sorts of views of the divinity to the same level of evidence, or rather of no evidence; and, on the ruin of all, to establish his horrible universal scepticism. Indeed the human mind is so totally incompetent to decide on these points, and the divine essence is so entirely removed from our comprehension, that nothing is more easy than for a man of lively imagination, unawed by the fear of God, that is to say for Mr. Hume, to represent many various views of this kind; and yet as the process is carried on without any date, the whole must be,

“ The baseless fabric of a vision.”

And if we consider what he owns must still escape the wreck of scepticism, that there must be somewhere an intelligence and design, that pervades the universe, which Eve called God, we shall have reason to be little affected with all his queries concerning his abstract nature, because it makes no part of our concern. That effects prove a cause, that numberless instances of design prove a designer, this affords

fords a sufficient basis of natural religion. That he is not material, every one who believes Scripture (the evidences of which are surely obtained in a way perfectly independent of this metaphysical enquiry) will acknowledge, because *God is a spirit, and a spirit hath not flesh and bones* *. There remain only the moral attributes of God to be considered. They only affect us as rational and accountable agents: And a dreary view it is which Mr. Hume has given of them. He contends, that, most probably, he has neither moral good nor moral evil in him, on account of the mixt appearance of things in the world, which seems to him to exclude the idea of either perfect goodness, or perfect malice †. Allowing that the objections against his goodness, deduced from the miseries with which the world is pregnant, are solidly answered from the consideration of our ignorance, he maintains that the same consideration will invalidate the proofs also ‡.

The last observation seems to contain the substance of all that deserves a careful answer in the treatise. The strength of it lies in the supposition, that the proofs drawn from the natural and moral world for the moral govern-

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* Luke xxiv. 39.—† Page 221.—‡ Page 219.

ment and attributes of God, are justly liable to the same charge as the objections are; that in both cases we have equal right to say, that we are incompetent to decide; whence universal scepticism must necessarily ensue.

The attentive reader now sees what he has a right to expect from the remainder of this section. It behoves us first to shew, that there are solid proofs of the righteous character of God: Secondly, That all objections, deduced from the phenomena of nature, are inconclusive, on account of our ignorance of the scheme of the Divine Government, at the same time that the proofs are not at all exposed to the like objections.

1. Let any man coolly attend to what passes within himself, and ask what account can be given of that principle within him which we call *Conscience*. However it has been derided, it is not derided out of the world; and any person may, if he pleases, convince himself of its power, by attending to the energy of its rebukes, in spite of the most subtil reasonings which he may have made use of to drown its voice*. Still it speaks, and speaks not like
other

* Let any man, who has attended to his own feelings, ask himself whether it be possible for any mode of education, either to implant or to eradicate this moral sense.

other principles and instincts of human nature†, but with an authority steady and strong, yet ever upright and equitable, commanding the whole man, and commanding no less the esteem than the fear of the whole human race. All render themselves more or less obnoxious to its rebukes; but to bribe it into silence, or rather to stupify and intoxicate it, would ask a long and enormous course of confirmed flagitiousness; and if it be ever effected at all, it leaves a man in a state too monstrous and unnatural, to excite any other ideas than those of horror and detestation. If any man might be conceived to have conquered in himself this awful principle, so as to have lost all idea of its influence, one is tempted to think it was Mr. Hume: Yet hear how elegantly, as well as emphatically, he describes it. Speaking of Somerset, the murderous favourite of James I. he says, “ The favourite had hitherto escaped

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† See Bishop Butler's Sermons on Human Nature and his Analogy. I once for all acknowledge here my great obligations to this author, and shall spare myself the labour of repeated references. He who would learn to cultivate his judgment, and at the same time to chastise his imagination in subjects of this nature, will do well to meditate this writer. He will at the same time furnish himself with an answer to all the deistical or sceptical speculations that ever were, or perhaps will be published.

“ the enquiry of justice ; but he had not
 “ escaped that still voice, which can make itself
 “ be heard amidst all the hurry and flattery of
 “ a court, and astonishes the criminal with
 “ a just representation of his most secret enormities.” And a little after, “ the grace of
 “ his youth gradually disappeared ; the gaiety
 “ of his manners was obscured ; his politeness
 “ and obliging behaviour were changed into
 “ fullness and silence.” *

This is but one instance of the dominion of conscience. What renders its empire decisively great, is the little or no connection which it has with any elaborate process of reasoning. Its voice is plain and strong, not inimical to, but far superior to the voice of reason. It requires, in common cases at least, very little sagacity to direct it : It speaks like an instinct in all men. And it is very observable, that plain men of tolerable equity, though of small capacity, generally more feel its force than the learned and the ingenious : For much argumentative skill is necessary to elude its force, none to sharpen and direct it.

From

* History of England, vol. vi. p. 75.

From these obvious considerations we may fairly infer, (so long as the common sense of mankind will lead them to look out for a cause of so powerful an effect) that this moral principle is implanted in all men by the Author of nature. And as it is not to be imagined, that he would implant in us what is contrary to his own nature, we are led to infer the moral perfections of God. *If he who made the eye must see**, he who gave to man a moral nature, must himself be the moral governor of the world. Justice, and equity, and goodness must be his delight; our very feelings witness it.

This is an argument, it is apprehended, completely conclusive in itself. It has recommended itself to the common sense of men in all ages. The very *intuitive* nature of this moral sense is no contemptible proof that it is from God. That which is plain and obvious to all, bids fairest to be natural. What if a few superior geniuses have sophisticated themselves out of the common feelings of humanity, and reasoned away the universal apprehensions of the species? Even those who have not talents to unravel the fallacies of their reasonings,

* Psalm xciv. 9, 10. *He that chastiseth the Heathen, shall not be correct?* The Psalmist argues much in the same manner.

reasonings, act not unreasonably in withholding their assent to conclusions, which are palpably contrary to the common sensations of mankind. These are certain and obvious; but things which are called demonstrations, are often mere cobwebs of the fancy, or tho' depending on a just concatenation of ideas for the most part, yet, through the omission or perversion of some seemingly trifling circumstance, become the most egregious and the most ridiculous follies.

Here then an obligation to obey the God of nature, abstracted from all consideration of the works of nature, is contracted by every moral agent: And the most confirmed Sceptic is inexcusably blind, if he will not see the righteousness and majesty of the Lord. Whatever uncertainties he may be under on the other side, they can never preponderate an undoubted certainty on this.

By the way, one may see here, not only how common but how reasonable it is, that plain men of little skill in argument, are most susceptible of assent in all questions of a religious and moral nature. Ingenious sceptics may suspect, that religion owes its chief support
to

to ignorance. But a more candid account may be given of the matter. The instinctive principle before us is, in unlettered men, more pure and unfullied. All true religion and true morality are on the whole so friendly to natural conscience, that it is no wonder their dictates gain a more easy assent from those in whom conscience does fairly its office, than from those who, by learned pride and fastidious reasoning, have adulterated its nature. For, truly, in a being so corrupt as man, (and corrupt he is in his will and understanding, notwithstanding the innate power of conscience) the more vigorous exercises of reason are, in religion, good for little else than to confound and mislead him. The intellectual faculty, the more solid and piercing it is, sinks only the deeper in absurdity, while it mixes itself with the mire and dirt of human depravity.

Further : This moral nature of man is not the only proof of the moral attributes of God. Final causes are as obvious in the administration of the moral, as of the natural world. The diseases attendant on lewdness and drunkenness, the mischiefs resulting from imprudence and inattention, the evidently natural tendency of goodness in its own nature to
praise,

praise, and honour, and prosperity, the awe with which even wickedness is struck at the sight of that goodness which it persecutes and afflicts, the accidental nature of those impediments, which, at present, prevent the dominion of goodness in the world; the hypocrisy of wicked men, who never punish goodness as such; all these considerations unite their strength in evincing the righteous character of the governor of the world. And it is material to our purpose to observe, that all these proofs, being drawn either from feelings or from facts, have neither the slippery nature of tedious reasonings, nor are they subject to the charge of intruding into what is incomprehensible by man.

Mr. Hume calls those who represent goodness in God of the same nature as in man, by the hard name of *Anthropomorphites*. A hard name weighs little with those whom reason governs rather than fancy. Scepticism should know some bounds. Justice and goodness are what they are in Spirit or in Man; and injustice and malice must be detestable in either: Our feelings tell us this; and I would no more reason with any who dispute this, than I would fight with a lion or a tiger. It may be worth
while

while to observe from Scripture here, that St. Peter declares *, that real Christians become partakers of the *divine nature*; and that LOVE, on which St. John so nobly, and yet so simply, writes in his first Epistle, is of the same nature in God and in the Saint.

Still further: The works of creation abound with proofs of Divine bounty and goodness, notwithstanding the miseries of mankind. So far as we can see and feel the proofs of this goodness, so far the proof of the moral attributes of God is decisive; neither is there any room to say we are not judges, because experience proves that we are. But to enter on this field is needless: Ray's Wisdom of God in the Works of Creation, and many other treatises, have done justice to it. The result of this whole head of argumentation is a positive proof of the moral perfections of God, in no one instance liable to imposition, because in all deduced from sensation, or from facts.

II. The futility of objections must now engage our attention: And here, at first sight, it deserves the serious consideration of every one who pretends to the least degree of modesty,

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whether

* 2 Peter i. 4.

whether he can possibly think, that his inability to account for any phænomena in nature, can form even the least presumption against the wisdom and goodness of God; whether, if every thing in the whole scheme of Divine government was perfectly commensurate with his capacity, he should not be inclined to harbour very mean and debasing conceptions of his majesty and greatness, and be tempted to think wickedly, *that God was even such an one as himself.* *

1. If the most reasonable modesty lead us to think *a priori*, that the Divine administration must be a system as such incomprehensible by us, it will be natural for us to consider in what lights we may probably be enabled to understand any thing of it. To say that, if the objections be inconclusive because of our ignorance, the proofs are equally so, is to say that we are incapable of understanding any thing at all which relates to it. This would be to establish a complete Scepticism indeed; but then it is a mere begging of the question, and will sooner shew the eagerness with which this impious man hastened to the horrible conclusion he had so much at heart, than any peculiar sagacity

* Psalm l. 21.

sagacity of reasoning. He ought to have examined the proofs distinctly, and to have shewn that they are really enveloped in the same clouds of ignorance in which the objections are. It is previously probable, that God would give us some satisfactory light into the *ends* of his government, but not much into the *means* by which it is carried on. Analogy dictates this. Children have a clear conception of the general *end* of their education. They soon learn, that the intent of the whole is to qualify them for future scenes of life; though sensible at the same time, that they are very incompetent judges of the means by which it may be most profitably carried on: Yet the allowed reasonableness of their submission to, and acquiescence under such circumstances, is a plain proof, that not only we are formed with a frame of mind originally suited to such a state of modest dependance, but that it is right and fitting it should be so. *The moral sense* is calculated to strengthen our view of the *end* of the Divine government, and to enable us to conclude, that in the issue God must do all things right, and that *though clouds and darkness are round about him, yet righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his seat*, and will appear so at the last with superior evidence. This, though a most

sublime, is yet a simple conception, and not beyond our faculties. But the means by which this scheme is carrying on are so intricate, and indeed the whole scheme itself consists of so many parts, and may have so many relations and dependancies to us totally unknown, that all objections deduced from this quarter display a pride and a folly, to the reprehension of which all language is unequal.

2. Yet even in the means we have some light, indeed very considerable light, considered positively, though, considered comparatively with what we do not know, very small. The whole affair of final causes in the works of nature, and the general laws of rewards and punishment in the works of providence, demonstrate this. Who can deny it to be an act of goodness as well as wisdom, for instance, that the human sight is situated where it is, when he reflects on the prodigious disadvantages which must ensue, in consequence of any other situation? It must be a degree of scepticism most dogmatically unreasonable, to deny that temperance, chastity, justice, moderation, are evidently marked out even in their temporal consequences, as things agreeable to God; and that intemperance, lewdness, injustice, and violence

violence are stigmatized in the same way with tokens of his displeasure. It is sufficient to have given a single instance, one in the natural, the other in the moral world. Thousands must occur to every careful observer. Here it is evident we are competent judges. The whole fact, with its consequences, lies before us. And we feel, we prove the goodness of God too palpably, to give reasonable room for the admission of doubt. The case is not so in those phænomena, which seem to lie on the other side. Why are volcanos, hurricanes, pestilences, and the like? Why do the righteous ever suffer under God's government? To confine ourselves merely here to the light of nature, we cannot say that we are judges of the whole of the case. What necessities of the natural and moral world in the œconomy of the divine government, may require these irregularities, and what on the whole will conduce to the health of the universe, we are no sort of judges. Of this we are sure, that the moral nature, which we feel, excludes every ground of fear, lest the impressions of divine goodness, which the cases we do understand are capable of affording, should be lost by any future arrangements of his providence; while the same moral nature affords us a strong presumption

sumption of our being enabled in future, to give a good account of those disagreeable phenomena, the causes of which we do not at present understand.

3. Let us try, if a similar case or two may not render this matter easy to our apprehensions, and credible to our understanding. A child is brought up by a kind and considerate parent. He is retrained from every thing which would hurt him, he is taught whatever may be conducive to his good in after-life, and has constant opportunities of observing the indulgent and provident care of his father. Will any man think that this is a just method of reasoning in the child? " Sometimes my father frowns on me, sometimes he smiles. " He gives me meat indeed, and accommodates me with all the necessaries of life; " but he denies me many things, which I " much desire. " The attention to study is irksome to me; but he compels me to it. It is " true, he is always telling me, that he does " every thing for my good, and I am daily " receiving some proof or other of it. But on " the whole, his conduct forms such a motley " mixture, that I cannot but conclude he has " neither good nor bad intentions toward me."

Exactly

Exactly of a piece with this is Mr. Hume's course of reasoning on the government of God. And he who can tell where lies the fallacy of the child's argument, with respect to the moral character of his father, may point out also, where lies the fallacy of the Sceptic's argument, with respect to the character of the Almighty.

Nor is this case only similar to that before us, but, properly speaking, a part of it. Domestic government evidently forms a considerable branch of the divine government, and is regulated by some of those general laws, by which the author of nature rules in the world.

The want of modesty is evident in this argument. To say that the disagreeable things he receives from his father, weigh as much on the side of malevolence as the agreeable do on the side of goodness, is to say, that the child's understanding is equal to the father's. Common modesty, as a branch of our moral nature, readily dictates to a child of tolerable docility an acquiescence in his father's superior judgment, in those things which he cannot account for; while the same moral sensation, aided by repeated experience of his own fallibility and of his superior knowledge, teaches

teaches him to give the full weight of commendation to all the kindness which he does receive from his parent.

How much stronger does this argument conclude with respect to the Almighty, when we consider that the necessary approbation of goodness which he has implanted in us, demonstrates the perfection of his moral attributes; and his infinite greatness leaves no room to compare the creature with him in understanding! If I have stated this matter in a just light, to say that the history of all time affords not a parallel to Mr. Hume's critique on the divine government in want of modesty, were perhaps no hardy assertion. If the child's pride would have in it a thousand evils, his must have tens of thousands.

Or conceive the same thing in another light. Here is a complicated machine invented by one of unquestioned superior ability and integrity, the end of which too is understood by those of the lowest capacity. If it seemed to us to fail of its end in some instances, merely through our want of understanding the machinery, and we were still assured by the maker, that all was going on as it ought, but
that

that the work was yet in a very imperfect state, this assurance, backed with demonstrative evidence of success in a variety of instances that fell within the level of our capacity, would remove all shadow of doubt from every reasonable mind.

The reader will not, perhaps, be displeased to see the exposition of this parable. That God is good, that the end of his government must be good, we feel from the moral nature he has given us. We find ourselves lost, however, in the mysterious conduct of the means he uses. But we see evidently that we understand not the sum of things, and experience tells us that nothing is more fallible than our judgment in these matters. While then we find undoubted proofs of his goodness in a variety of cases, we cannot rationally doubt the perfection of his moral character.

It is hoped that the grand sophism of this arrogant performance is exposed and refuted. Indeed his Cleanthes, with many others, would persuade us that the world is not full of misery. But Philo for once may be believed: Matter of fact shews that it is miserable to a degree beyond the powers of description.

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Indeed

Indeed Christianity is built on this foundation, and without it would be the most unintelligible thing in the world. It alone acquaints us not only with the remedy of all our evil, but also with the first introduction of it. Bold infidelity catches fire in a moment, "why should we suffer for our first father's sin," or "why suffer so very severely?" Let her be asked, is she a judge of the nature of that union which the Scripture affirms* to subsist between Adam and the whole human race, and from which alone must flow the rectitude of the imputation of his transgressions to us? Or is she a judge of the malignity of sin, and of the reasons for which it must be punished by the Sovereign of the universe? If he only is a proper judge of these things, and if we have no data, on which to build the slightest argumentation, the objections, however they may play round the imagination, have no right to determine the judgment in the least. And matter of fact all around in this sorrowful world is speaking for God, and conscience fails not to speak for him within. Even the analogy of nature, which points out numberless instances of innocent persons suffering for the guilty, in the daily course of Divine Providence, and particularly

* See Rom. v.

particularly in the sufferings of children for the offences of their parents, demonstrates that this is far from being an uncommon dispensation.

“ Were that Divine Being disposed to be offended at the vices and follies of silly mortals, who are his own workmanship.” It is too late to reason on the case: It is matter of fact that he *is* displeased. What opiate stupified this man, that he could not see it? The drunkard, the thief, the murderer, the spendthrift are continually meeting with the punishment of their crimes in the natural consequence of things. He might as justly have said, that the sanctions of human laws, which are provided against various offences, do yet argue in the legislators no displeasure against them.

How sincere he was in his professions of respect for revealed religion, expressed in the close of the book, his treatment of every material scripture-truth, in the whole course of the book declares. We have* already taken notice of his audacious observation, that no popular religion (consequently not the

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Christian)

* Section iii. Part iii.

Christian) gives an eligible view of the happiness of a future world. One might challenge even natural reason itself to conceive the possibility of a more eligible heaven than that of the Scriptures. Let any man learn thence*, that Heaven is Love. If love be not happiness, what can be? Nor is it in this only, but in every thing needful, the Scriptures meet our difficulties, and answer our doubts. And I hope it has been shewn, that there we learn what true happiness is, and the real and only road to it through this evil world.

In the mean-time what do those men deserve, who labour to rob mankind of the only thing which is calculated to direct them into the way of happiness, and prostitute superior talents to the invention of notions tending to deprive the unwary of that faith, which, for any thing they know to the contrary, may be necessary for their eternal welfare? I appeal to Mr. Gibbon's humanity (Hume is out of my reach) how he feels on such an occasion! I ask his good sense, whether he ought not to have had a complete demonstration of the falsehood of what is vulgarly called ORTHODOXY, before he wrote a syllable of any thing that

* 1 Cor. xiii. throughout.

that had an Infidel tendency, lest he might be accessory to the eternal damnation of souls!

I have taken no notice of Hume's Demea, because I cannot find a feature of Christianity about him. Dr. Clark's metaphysics and the Gospel have, I think, no sort of connection.

SECTION XIII.

Validity of the Evidences of Christianity.

THE proofs of Christianity may properly be considered either as external, or internal, or experimental. I shall not speak of these with a view of undertaking the proof of the Gospel in form, which has been ably and fully performed by many writers, but with a view of illustrating what has been laid down in the preceding Section, concerning the different nature of proofs and of objections, and of establishing its solidity in revealed as well as in natural religion.

The external proofs are, in the opinion of many, superseded *a priori*. "Our sins," say they, "can never be so offensive to God, as to incur eternal damnation; and what must
" become

“ become at this rate of the many nations who
 “ never heard of Christianity ?” But, surely,
 this language is a mere begging of the question:
 How came you to be a judge of the Divine
 arcana ? Upon what principles of reasoning can
 you in this case build any opinion, except on
 those which are deduced from experience ? To
 reason without facts is as absurd in divinity as
 it is in philosophy. The Newtonian System
 justly triumphs over all others, because it dis-
 cards mere hypothesis, and reasons from expe-
 rience. The prejudices of men will not suffer
 them to see, that deism and scepticism proceed
 as absurdly in theology as Des Cartes did in
 philosophy. To reason without facts is wild
 fancy indeed. “ It would be cruel to damn
 men”—but there are a thousand things in the
 present course of nature, which we should have
 ordered otherwise : And therefore experience
 alone of what is the will of God in fact, not of
 what we think it ought to be, must be of any
 weight in this subject. We are infinitely less
 qualified to judge what is reasonable for God
 to do or not to do, than a child is to judge of
 a man’s affairs. But matters of fact we may
 judge of, because they lie within the reach of
 our faculties.

Look

Look then at the face of the world; say, is sin so trifling? How dare men say, that a mistake in the choice of our religion is so immaterial, when in life it is often seen that a mistake is the ruin of a man's fortune? What severe torments do many sins bring on men even here? Is not this a specimen, that God judges and punishes sin severely? When you behold the world filled with diseases, poverty, war, plagues, oppression, violence, and deceit, these matters of fact speak to you loudly the awful justice of God, and demonstrate that he is not that easy careless Being men suppose.

And how arrogant must it be to assert, that the Christian religion, if true, *ought* to have been spread over the world? Does God do so in any other case? Are not medicines, matters of science, the arts of civilization well known in one part of the globe, and not in another? Experience then shews *a priori*, that it is not likely that God should spread his religion equally over the world, because it is not agreeable to his method of acting in a variety of other cases.

And so important is the eternal interest of men, that even doubtful evidence ought to determine

termine a man practically on the side of Christianity. Were mere self-love only considered, he ought to chuse the safest side. Here again God alone must be the judge of the degree of evidence which it shall please him to afford us. And the wickedness of writers, in endeavouring to render men regardless of the Gospel, appears to be only equalled by their folly.

When these considerations have had their influence in removing the force of objections from the mind, the positive evidences themselves may be considered. As,

1. The evidence of miracles. And the peculiar excellency of them lies in this, that the belief of them could not have obtained, had they been false. The miracles of Egypt, of the Red Sea, of Manna, of the death of Korah, with many others that might have been enumerated, are of this kind. There were some standing miracles which plainly bespeak a divine interposition. The land of that highly-favoured people, after five years uninterrupted tillage, which one would imagine should have exhausted its prolific virtue, yielded constantly such an extraordinary increase, as to supply the demands of the succeeding year, when, by the divine appointment,

appointment, it was to lie fallow and uncultivated*. All their males were ordered also, at three stated solemnities every year, to appear at Jerusalem. What a trial of their faith! thus to have their frontiers naked and defenceless, exposed as they were to such numerous enemies; yet they were never invaded at this critical juncture, as the Lord had promised them by Moses, *their enemies shall not desire their land at those seasons*†. Is it to be conceived, that the credit of their religion could have been preserved, unless these events constantly happened? And notwithstanding their frequent relapses into idolatry, it appears that the Israelites constantly did, in a speculative sense at least, believe their religion to be from God.

The same kind of reasoning is easily applicable to the New Testament miracles.

2. Nor would Mr. Gibbon ‡ have spoken so disrespectfully of the evidence of prophecy, which, by his usual subtilty of representation, has an evident tendency to draw an unwary reader to form a mean conception of it, had he himself, with any tolerable degree of candour, examined it. The prophetic accounts

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* Lev. xxv. 21. —† Exod. xxxiv. 24. —‡ Page 517.

of Jesus contained in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and preserved by the most virulent enemies of the Gospel, are no ambiguous things. There is not a circumstance of any considerable note relating to the Redeemer's history and character, or even to the reception which his mission would have among men, but it is delineated in the plainest terms. This has been shewn too often to need any illustration here. His contemptuous treatment of such evidence in general, may affect the *imagination* of some; but it behoved him to have attempted a regular and distinct refutation, in order really to convince the *judgment* of any. Suffice it to say, that the *proofs* on this head are of the most simple nature, and the farthest removed from the reach of those charges of unintelligible mystery, which must ever affect the *objections*.

3. The same observation is applicable to the fulfilment of prophecies relating to the state of the nations who have made the greatest figure in antient or in modern story: But all that might be said on this head has been anticipated by Bishop Newton in his Dissertations, which will shew to every candid mind a long series of prophetic proof deduced through ages.

4. I would only add here particularly, that three very remarkable sorts of people are spoken of in the Bible, whose existence even to this day affords one of the strongest proofs of its real credibility, the Jews, the Papists, and real Christians. The case of the first needs no elucidation. The other two are equally striking, though *certain prejudices* may prevent many from being equally affected with the argument. Is it not foretold, that the man of sin should appear; should set himself up as God; should magnify himself against the Prince of princes? Who is this but the Pope? For who but he pretends to infallibility, and the power of forgiving sins? And who is that *whore*, in whom *was found the blood of martyrs*, but the same bloody church of Rome? Whose *coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness*; witness the thousands of frauds and lying legends of the same apostate church. She has two distinctive marks set upon her by St. Paul, *forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats*, not holding the head, says he, in another place: They trust not in Christ alone for the forgiveness of sin and holiness of heart, and are therefore led into numberless superstitions. These two, of abstinence from

meats at certain seasons, and of connecting the idea of celibacy with that of superior holiness, are prophecied of, and plainly point her out, as the Antichrist spoken of in Scripture to all who do not wilfully shut their eyes.

A third sort of people are spoken of every where in the Bible; those I mean who express the power of the Gospel in their life and conversation. Certain it is, that there is nothing said of their character, circumstances, and treatment in the world, but it is fulfilling at this day.

They are described as entering in at the strait gate, being but few in comparison of the many who walk in the broad way; and so it is to this day. They set their affections on things above; they count all things but dung for Christ's sake; they believe in him only for life eternal; they have joy in the Holy Ghost; they are harmless in the midst of a crooked generation; they do what they do in *the name of the Lord*; they avoid filthiness and foolish talking; they speak to one another in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs; they have all manner of evil falsely spoken of them for Christ's sake; and men hate them, and separate them from their company.

company. Men stumble at their doctrine, because they profess to seek salvation by grace, not by works. The men of the world are tempted to look on them continually as Mr. Gibbon's* favourite Pagans did on the first Christians, as weak or obstinate enthusiasts. *and very correctly, as if they do not seek it by the combination of both, for the one is the sequence of the other*

If no such persons were to be found in Great-Britain, yet still the declaration of Jesus, that the gates of Hell should never prevail against his Church, would stand good, since their existence in other parts of the globe would confirm it; and there is no promise that fixes their existence to any particular soil or climate. But this kingdom is favoured with the existence of living members of Christ's body, perhaps, with all its abounding profligacy, as much as any nation upon earth: And they carry about with them a character of humility and of charity, radically distinct from the pride of Pagan virtue, and condemning it to the full as much as the grossest notorious wickedness.

This would lead me to consider the internal evidences of Christianity. But they have been stated in the foregoing sections: For it has been

* Page 516.

been proved, I hope, by an argument, of which the meanest capacity may determine, that the very nature of the Gospel is such, that it could not have been propagated but by a divine influence.

But the experimental evidences are to all, who are capable of feeling their force, the most convincing of any. If *any man will do his will, he shall know* *, says the great Author of Christianity. *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself* †, says his beloved Apostle. Accordingly there have always been, and are at this day, those who solemnly and constantly declare, that they habitually experience in their own hearts the very same things which the Scripture describes as the inseparable concomitants of a lively faith in Jesus, which, to unbelievers, are perfectly unintelligible, which were once so to themselves, and which are now intuitively evident. With them every day's experience is bringing in accumulated evidence to the truth of the Scriptures; the written word and the exercises of their own minds are in perpetual correspondence and harmony. And here again the *proof* is of the most simple kind, matter of fact, and depends on no such incom-

* John vii. 17.—† 1 John v. 10.

incomprehensible matter as the objections must ever do. If it be asked what sort of men these are, they are indisputably the most innocent, and the most upright of human kind. To themselves the evidence resulting from this new spiritual life must, in its very nature, afford the completest satisfaction; to others it has the nature of the most credible testimony, abundantly sufficient to excite in every mind, impressed with a deep sense of the importance of eternity, an ardent desire, by prayer and serious enquiry, to attain the same satisfaction on the same ground of encouragement. *God giveth the HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him**.

Thus does it appear, that the proofs of Christianity are built on reasonable grounds, and the objections on unreasonable ones, in the same manner as we have seen to be the case in natural religion. The proofs are drawn from things within our reach; the objections ambitiously extend themselves beyond the level of our capacities.

Yet a prejudiced mind will ever find some little cavil or other to support itself in unbelief, even against the force of the most irrefragable

* Luke xi. 13.

fragable arguments. The conclusion of Mr. Gibbon's fifteenth chapter affords a striking proof of this.

“ The lame walked,” says he, “ the blind saw, the sick were healed, the dead were raised, dæmons were expelled, and the laws of nature were perpetually suspended for the benefit of the Church. But the Sages of Greece and Rome turned aside from the awful spectacle, and pursuing the ordinary occupations of life and study, appeared unconscious of any alterations in the moral or physical government of the world.”

Here is a bold insinuation, that no such miracles were ever wrought: If they were, it is impossible but these same Sages must have been convinced by them. In no part of his work does our author so plainly avow his own infidelity.

But with or *without* the leave of Mr. Gibbon and his Sages, neither the fact is fairly stated; nor if it were, do the consequences follow. An unwary reader might be led to suppose, by his representation of the case, that the great men of Greece and Rome were said, by the advocates
of

of Christianity, to have been constant eye-witnesses of miraculous interpositions. But who ever asserted such a thing before our author? Miracles were *frequently* indeed, not *perpetually* wrought; but the great men of the world were so remote from all Christian connections, and had such an entire contempt of them, that there is great room for questioning whether any, or scarce any, of them ever saw one miracle performed. By credible testimony they might have known such miracles were performed indeed; but any candid observer of the circumstances of the miracles wrought in the primitive times may see, that it required some attention to Christianity, and some attendance on its ministers, in order to become eye-witnesses of them.

Nor would the conclusion hold good, if the miracles had been forced upon their observation. It is well known that Julian, the Apostate, allowed the miracles of Jesus to have been real, and yet saw nothing glorious or divine in him who performed them. *His* testimony to the victorious evidence of the miracles themselves is decisive: He ascribed them no doubt to magick. It suits not modern scepticism, with its parade of reasoning, to fol-

low him here : It appears safe and more specious, at this great distance of time, to deny the miracles themselves. The unreasonable malignity of infidelity is curious, but striking. Antient Infidels were forced to believe the miracles, but yet despised the religion they were intended to support : Whilst modern Infidels, from this very contempt, infer that they did not believe the miracles themselves.

“ Under the reign of Tiberius,” continues our author, “ the whole earth, or at least a “ celebrated province of the Roman Empire, “ was involved in a preternatural darkness of “ three hours.—It happened during the life- “ time of Seneca and the elder Pliny, who “ must have experienced the immediate effects, “ or received the earliest intelligence, of the “ prodigy. Each of these philosophers, in a “ laborious work, has recorded all the great “ phænomena of nature, earthquakes, meteors, “ comets, and eclipses, which his indefatigable “ curiosity could collect. Both the one and “ the other have omitted to mention the greatest “ Phænomenon to which the mortal eye has “ been witness since the creation of the globe.”

Euphonia,

Εὐγεννα, Ευγεννα, I have demolished Christianity, our author may well cry, in the triumph of his heart, with Archimedes after the invention of his problem. Indeed here is an attack upon the Gospel, the most direct of any to be met with in the book.

I promised the reader to stand on my own ground, and to avoid, as much as possible, the repetition of any thing that had been advanced by any of his answerers. I beg leave to refer him, therefore, to Dr. Watson's refutation of this argument, only suggesting, that his idea of the darkness at the passion being by no means so complete as is generally supposed, but rather only a general gloom, is not destitute of probability. Or if we suppose the darkness to have been confined to Judea, the prejudice against that country would probably prevent the Roman *Sages* from regarding a miracle of that climate; and *credat Judæus Apella* would contain the whole of their lucubrations on the subject.

But we are not obliged to account for their incredulity on the point at all, in order to strengthen the evidence of Christianity. Let any man consider by what sort of evidence he

is influenced in common life. If matter of fact, on credible repeated testimony, plead for an event, the assent of the human mind is thought perfectly natural, though some odd circumstances relating to the event may appear to be perfectly unaccountable. In no court of human judicature is this method of procedure thought to be unreasonable. We know so little of the springs, motives, and connections of events, that no man thinks himself obliged to account for every thing in a matter of fact, before he yield to evidence. Positive proof must stand good*, though various circumstances may appear in their own nature improbable. For the world is full of such sort of improbabilities; and it would be very strange, if good evidence must be rejected, because Seneca and Pliny in one case acted unlike themselves. The attentive reader, who calmly weighs the natural motions of the human mind, will see that this is perfectly agreeable to our allowed method of acting in all other cases; and

* The intelligent reader need not be told, that in this case the positive proof is the testimony of the Evangelists, who mention the extraordinary darkness; and whose credibility in general, as witnesses, who were neither themselves deceived, nor were capable of deceiving others, has been so amply illustrated, that I could only repeat here, what has been shewn by others; and let me add, what no Infidel has scarce attempted to expose as inconclusive.

and it would be strange, if the vast importance of Christianity should form a singular exception with regard to the allowance of its proofs. Universal scepticism, in common life as much as in religion, must follow on the admission of so extravagant an idea.

An historical case may set this matter in the clearest light. No one in our days, who has read the whole history of the Popish Plot in Charles the Second's time with any candour and attention, believes it. The incoherence, and every way incredible circumstances of the whole deposition, together with the infamous characters of the witnesses, preclude our assent. Yet a circumstance to this day unaccounted for, the murder of Sir Edmonbury Godfrey, happened to give it an air of credibility. Yet he would be thought injudicious to the last degree, who should thence be inclined to favour the evidence of Oates. The case before us is opposite, but parallel. Christianity stands supported by positive evidences of the most unexceptionable nature; yet the circumstance of Seneca's and Pliny's silence concerning the eclipse, admit only for argument's sake, is unaccountable.—The evidence of the Gospel is, however, by no means shaken, nor will be shaken,

shaken, till any man can prove, that we must be able to account for every thing in an event, before we admit any testimony of the event itself.

CONCLUSION.

TO recapitulate what has been attempted in this tract, may at once refresh the reader's memory, and pave the way to a free address, in conclusion, to the different sorts of characters interested in the subject.

The union between Infidelity and Infallibility was never more practically, though it is by no means speculatively, believed than at the present day. The Pope of Rome has lost his throne in the eyes of all men of sense; and Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume, and Gibbon may seem to contend for the vacant seat, or rather reign in conjunction. Their decretals in religion are swallowed without examination; they argue, or they assert; and historical objects must be seen only through the medium which they give to the publick. The censure of Infidelity is theirs; but the prompt belief of their assertions, and the affected mimicry of their contempt
of

of Christianity, are to be ascribed to the sceptical propensity of the age, joined to its indolence and inconsideration. Thus one learned and laborious enemy of the Gospel furnishes assertions, if not arguments, for thousands; they are prepared to answer whatever may have been suggested by the most judicious Divines, with this "Mr. Gibbon has shewn the matter in another light."

Of these four men, the two first, though men of genius, are allowed to have possessed no true judgment. To the two last, every candid person will attribute the praise of a sound and vigorous understanding. That the abilities of the last, eminently respectable in other subjects, have failed him in theology, was the design of the first part to shew; and I shall think the labour not to have been in vain, if the discovery of his mistakes and misrepresentations may strip him of his infallibility in the eye of the publick, and dispose them to listen with attention to the far more important matter which follows.

With this view it was shewn in several miscellaneous articles, some of more, others of less importance, that he has misrepresented Christianity.

stianity. None of his mistakes are ascribed to want of capacity ; but all of them purely to the power of prejudice, of which there is this strong presumption, that none of his errors are in favour of Christianity, but are all of an opposite tendency.

As he has shewn a particular dislike to the character of Cyprian of Carthage, one Section is appropriated to wipe off the aspersions cast on the name of that excellent Prelate.

The conduct of the Roman Emperors, with reference to Christianity, has been examined ; the character of the suffering Christians has been vindicated ; it has been evinced that they were an innocent people, and that their persecutors exercised rigorous cruelties to a degree far beyond what Mr. Gibbon assigns.

But what is Christianity itself ? A view of its real nature may more directly lead to a just discovery of the truth on these subjects, and open the way to the most important speculations which can influence the mind of man.

This the second part has briefly attempted. The third part, in a variety of considerations,
deduces

deduces the natural consequences, and attempts to prove, that, in the ideas of faith, of holiness, of a future state, of humanity, of chastity, of glory, of rationality, and of the Church of Christ, a real Christian is essentially distinct not only from avowed Infidels, but also from thousands of those who profess Christianity, but really believe it not; and whom I beg leave to call by the name of FORMALISTS.

This review not only obviates many charges of Mr. Gibbon, because it shews that those whom he accuses were no more real Christians than professed Pagans were; but, it is hoped, may lead the serious person to an earnest investigation of the Scriptures themselves, that he may educe his creed from thence, and not implicitly take up with the prevailing fashions of the times.

Hence also the grand design of Mr. Gibbon, in his two last chapters, or, if he pleases, the tendency of those two chapters, is refuted. If one may be allowed to guess the design of a writer so void of frankness, it seems to have been this, to shew that such a religion as Christianity might have had an origin merely human; and that there is no occasion to have re-

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course

course to miracles, or indeed any supernatural agency, to account for its establishment in the world. Mr. Gibbon has too much good sense not to perceive that this is the evident tendency of the former of the two chapters in question, and that every reader who agrees with his reasonings, will naturally form this conclusion. And if this be allowed, it is not necessary that I should have a positive proof of this design, in order to justify the severity with which I have treated him. I have endeavoured then to point out the necessity and the reality of a supernatural influence, even that of divine grace, resulting from the peculiar nature of Christianity itself, in order to account for the successful propagation of this religion. It has amply appeared, I hope, that *such* a religion must have been from God, is *peculiarly his*, and could neither have been invented nor propagated by *man*.

The true cause of the enmity against the Christians is laid open, the insufficiency of that assigned by Mr. Gibbon is exposed, and it is shewn that the spirit by which Galerius *persecuted*, and that by which Mr. Gibbon has *written*, was, in reality, the same.

Thus

Thus one great argument for the truth of Christianity is illustrated, drawn from its peculiar nature and successful propagation in conjunction; which, independently of all others, it is apprehended, forms a complete demonstration of its DIVINITY.

It seemed not amiss, however, to retouch the more common standing arguments in its favour, and to evince their solidity. And as, at the very threshold of Divine Truth, a stubborn antagonist presented himself, an attempt was made to overturn the subtil reasonings of Mr. Hume in favour of universal scepticism. This was done by shewing that the proofs of religion remain in all their strength, notwithstanding the ignorance of man; and that the objections are justly overthrown because of the same ignorance.

What we are competent to decide, and what not, and the application of this distinction to the point in question, has been shewn. The same mode of reasoning is applied in a more obvious and easy way to the proofs of revealed religion.

There are three sorts of persons evidently interested in this whole subject.

1. SCEPTICS or INFIDELS, who professedly doubt of or disbelieve Christianity.

2. FORMALISTS, who fancy they believe it, when they do not, and who do not even understand what it is.

3. REAL BELIEVERS in the proper sense of the words.

A few serious words to each at parting may not be amiss: They surely cannot be unseasonable.

1. The favourite notion of Sceptics is, that all religious opinions are much alike with respect to practical influence; and thus, in religion, the most important concern of any to mankind, if it be of any importance at all, they dissolve that connection between the understanding and the will, which is allowed to subsist in every other concernment. No wonder, with these views, that they exclaim against the injustice and bigotry of condemning men for mistakes of the understanding. But it is hoped that the connection between Divine Truth

Truth and Holiness of life has been evinced in the course of these sheets. Christianity condemns no man for mistakes of the head *as such*, but always for baseness of heart. And the thing which it behoves every Infidel to disprove, in order to justify his contempt of revelation, is, that he is not guilty of any insincerity of mind toward God in his unbelief. It affords, at first sight, a strong suspicion that he is, because he turns a deaf ear to all arguments in favour of the Gospel, while similar arguments, and far weaker, gain his ready assent on other subjects. Such men must allow the evidences of Christianity to be very considerable, and yet they reject them as of no weight at all. The worst part of this business is, that they take it for granted, that their hearts are honest, impartial, sincere; though the whole process of human affairs might shew them, that nothing is more common than for men to deceive themselves here through the blindness of self-love. The formal nature of unbelief, in the scriptural sense of the word, comprehends in it a baleful assemblage of all wickedness. The authority of God, his attributes and perfections, and even his Being, so far as any thing practical is concerned, is denied by it. O, Sirs! if ever your consciences
operate

operate with any thing of their native force, they will convince you, that such a pure religion as that of Jesus deserved not to be dismissed without being seriously heard. It is easy for you, in health and prosperity, to despise such plain reflections as these; but a near prospect of eternity, attended with the least sensation of the value of your souls, must awaken you into very just and rational fears of the most alarming nature. If you fancy moral honesty and humanity will save you, consider that this is not the language of conscience. Is duty owing to man only? Is none owing to the God who made you? And if he has presented you with a religion the most beneficial and the most holy that can be conceived, becomes it you to reject the present with scornful indifference? "But how do we know that the religion is his?" In this address I only intreat you to be serious, candid, and fair enquirers. There is no medium in the case. If Christianity be true, this sentence of it must be true also, *He that believeth not shall be damned**. I am under no pain for the consequence, if once, in the spirit of prayer and serious enquiry, levity and bantring apart, you begin to examine. *If any man will do his will, he shall know*†. Your
unbelief

* Mark xvi. 16.—† John vii. 17.

unbelief is represented in Scripture as the result of pride, perverseness, rebellion. *You hate the light, lest your deeds should be reprov'd* *. You ought to be certain that this is not the case, before you exclaim against the unreasonableness of condemning men for mere opinions. Yours is an unfair state of the case. The Scripture is as uniform in representing all virtue to be involved in faith, as it is in representing all wickedness to be involved in unbelief. Mr. Gibbon, in the case of Paul of Samosata †, supposes, that the Christians were unreasonable in condemning him for nice and subtil errors in doctrine, rather than for the immorality of his life. But his errors were not so unimportant as he imagines. His views seem on the whole to have much resembled those of the modern Socinians ‡. No wonder that his life was wicked. Men may talk of virtue, but provision for the effectual practice of it is only attained in the school of Christ, from which, in reality, Socinianism is as abhorrent as any Deism whatever. The atonement and intercession of God the Son, and the influence of God the Holy Ghost, being excluded or explained away, nothing remains of the Gospel,
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* John iii. 20. — † Page 561. — ‡ Mosheim's Eccl. Hist. p. 128. Quarto Edition.

in effect, but what it has in common with the religion of nature.

And if experience prove, that as we have advanced in infidel principles, we have advanced in wickedness, the connection, I would earnestly put you in mind of, has the strong support of matter of fact. The times are awful, Sirs ! and call for serious thought. Christianity has been scorned without examination, and in a levity of spirit extremely unbecoming the dignity of the subject. And as if the tide of unbelief were not strong enough already in the land, an author of the first estimation for learning and talents has aided the cause. Could a person of my obscurity hope to attract the attention of the Great, I would say, Be serious for your souls ; search the Scriptures ; examine closely the evidences of its truth ; and pray for that Spirit which the Scriptures promise to those who petition the Almighty.

2. It must have appeared to the most superficial reader, that the Gospel, in my view of it, is quite a different thing from that which it is apprehended to be by the major part of those who call themselves Christians. This, it ought not to be dissimulated, is really the case.

The

The doctrines of Scripture were very early perverted; and though a pure Church, in some individuals, has ever been successively preserved, yet, on the whole, a darkness, not radically better than that of Paganism itself, seems to have prevailed, after the perversion once took place, even till the æra of the Reformation. I am sensible how obnoxious to the charge of supercilious arrogance I am rendered by this view of things. But, in truth, he who confesses himself to be as vile and as ignorant as others by nature, and to be indebted to a very peculiar Divine light and grace, if indeed he be now different from them, has of all men the least right to be proud. And even the suspicion of arrogance he would gladly avoid, if the interest of truth and duty, and compassion to souls would admit it. The candid reader will then bear with the appearance of a dogmatical spirit; I hope it is not the reality.

The Reformation was one of the brightest periods of evangelical truth, and its happy religious and moral effects were extremely palpable in Protestant countries. But let us mark the *dire crisis* of its decline in England.

Beyond all doubt much hypocrisy and much real enthusiasm prevailed during the civil confusions of the last century, though much real piety prevailed also at the same time. After the Restoration, some leading men in the Established Church endeavoured to correct these evils. The method they took can scarce be better explained than by one, who so deeply entered into their scheme, that he owns he learned the best part of what he knew from some of them*. Speaking of one of them, Whichcot, he says, " Being disgusted with
 " the dry systematical way of those times, he
 " studied to raise those who conversed with him
 " to a nobler set of thoughts, and to consider
 " religion as a seed of a *deiform* nature. In order
 " to this, he set young students much on reading the antient philosophers, chiefly Plato,
 " Tully, Plotin; and on considering the Christian religion as a doctrine sent from God,
 " both to elevate and sweeten human nature." So this set of men at Cambridge studied to assert and examine the principles of religion and morality on clear grounds, and in a philosophical method—the making out the reasons of things being a main part of their studies.—But let the reader see the whole account in Burnet himself, who

* Burnet's History of his Own Times, vol. i. p. 319.

who enters with evident pleasure into every part of their scheme.

Had these men, in attempting to correct certain abuses and errors, made use only of the Scriptures, which are certainly sufficient to *perfect the man of God*, and completely *furnish him for every good work**, they doubtless might have found ample matter of rebuke for mere Enthusiasts, and of correction for really good men, who should have needed it: But, alas! in attempting to cure the *patient*, they destroyed him. For is it so indeed, that Scripture-truth needs to be retouched and polished by Pagan philosophers?

Were the Platonists the great enemies of Christianity while living, and could the works they left behind them be serviceable to it? Might not these *rational* Divines have learned from the knowledge they had, or might have had, from history of the deadly opposition of Platonism to the Gospel, that it was impossible they should ever incorporate? and was no more respect due to the inspired writings of St. Paul, who expressly guards us against the poisonous effects of philosophy? †

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But

* 2 Tim. iii. 17.—† Colof. ii. 8. 1 Tim. vi. 20, 21.

But they administered the poison, and posterity feel the malignant effect to this hour. It has pleased God, in his infinite mercy, in various local instances, to revive among us the doctrines of the Reformation at this day. But in general the Church of England has drooped, as to every holy purpose, ever since this proud attempt of employing reason to correct the Gospel. It surely is its own guard; it disdains any other; and if every part of it be impartially studied, one part will check and balance another. But these men, by introducing heterogeneous matter, adulterated its very nature. It was no peccadillo; it was an error of the first magnitude, and the consequences have shewn it to be so. With difficulty, a barren orthodoxy of sentiment, with reference to the Trinity and the Atonement, was for a while preserved: But the influence of the Holy Ghost in regeneration and sanctification, together with justification by faith in Christ alone, and the Scripture-views of the true character of God and of fallen man, were soon destroyed or debilitated among us. All idea of feeling in religion, or of what St. John calls *fellowship with the Father and the Son**, was ridiculed as Enthusiasm. The indolent part of the Clergy contented themselves with a
servile

* 1 John i.

servile imitation of these admired models; the laborious and more enterprizing have made bolder advances into the province of haughty reason. Many Dissenters have caught the infection, and, being less restrained by subscriptions, have openly avowed principles directly opposite to the real Gospel. The science of Ethics alone is left in repute; Christian mysteries are excluded as occult, or frivolous, or false; and the leaven of reason* has spread itself through all Christianity, and threatens to leave neither root nor branch.

What the precious truths of the Gospel are, which have been by this means corrupted among us, has appeared for the most part in the foregoing sheets, in which, if not the whole of Gospel-truth, yet its leading features have been described. In a word, Philosophy and Christianity will not, cannot be united.

The advantage hence given to Infidels is evident. Scepticism has prevailed abundantly: How was it possible that it should be otherwise? The defenders of Christianity understood it not themselves;

* The candid reader will easily see, that I mean by the word *reason*, a spirit of religious investigation, which exerts itself independantly of revealed truth.

themselves; and while they ably defended the outworks, I mean its external evidences, they betrayed its citadél to the enemy. And the inward and best proof of its truth deduced from its peculiar nature, they could not see, they could not defend, while they rejected, with a scorn nothing less than Deistical, its distinguishing peculiarities.

Practice has grown as corrupt as principle. This must be the case. The preaching of morality is not God's appointed way of making men holy in their lives. It has a place, an extremely necessary place in doctrine to sustain, but not a prominent one. Christ and him crucified is the chief Gospel-theme. Who does not see what an increase of wickedness has prevailed among us! Look at the Clergy. I would be tender in speaking of my brethren; but is there not a loud call for it in charity? That sermons should be sold to them by a person advertising in the news-papers*, is a flaming proof of the low state of their religious views and studies.

With regard to the Universities I would be tender also; but truth calls for a charitable animadversion. The neglect of true theological

* Dr. Truſſer.

cal knowledge among the students is palpable; and a general insensibility to divine things, is, I fear, too sadly prevalent in the Colleges, the servants of the Colleges, and the country around them.

But to dwell on particular corruptions of the times is needless; nor does Satire make any part of my design; that we are a selfish, profane, licentious people is evident. *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.* I shall be happy, if any real light has been thrown on the true cause of it. Let me desire those who may find themselves concerned in these animadversions, particularly my brethren the Clergy, to weigh in charity what has been in charity advanced. And if they are at all convinced of its truth, to apply themselves, by prayer and scriptural investigation, to the attainment of the knowledge of the real Gospel, the true and only cure of infidelity and immorality, however strong, however inveterate.

3. Though this tract is not peculiarly designed for the use of real believers, yet as it is hoped the subjects handled in it may not be altogether unserviceable to them, let a cordial word in the close engage their attention. You

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are fallen on evil days and evil tongues ; your principles are to the last degree unfashionable. On that account hold them fast, and maintain and confess them before the world as freely and as tenaciously, as the world adhere to their maxims and customs. I do not mean that you should be noisy, ostentatious disputants ; it is worth no man's while to contend vehemently for opinions merely as such : But, oh ! *contend earnestly for the faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, by an hearty exercise of it in all your conduct. Give no way to any conciliatory schemes, which vainly attempt to unite the interests of God and Mammon. The self-knowledge which you have, bears witness to the concurrent testimony of Scripture, that reason, the more decent and plausible part of man, is as much alienated from God as the passions. Cherish, by constant prayer and inward communion with God, the Divine Life which you have received, and support it by faith, notwithstanding all the noise which men, ignorant of Divine Truth, may make concerning enthusiasm and licentiousness, and all the wise caution of luke-warm professors. The peculiar truths of the Gospel are not merely matters of expedience and of preference to other sorts of religious views ; they are your very LIFE, and
that

that holiness, *without which no man shall see the Lord*, and which is the ultimate end of all your religion, can have neither subsistence nor growth without them. And be not seduced from the *truth as it is in Jesus*, by the falls of many false professors : Be assured, that though many who profess the Gospel disgrace it altogether by their practice, yet that there is, however, no other way than that of the genuine Gospel, which leads to real virtue. Men may deceive themselves with a false faith, and the fruits may awfully prove it ; but still the true faith is absolutely necessary for the production of the least degree of real holiness. A life of faith in the Son of God is as necessary for holiness here, as it is for glory hereafter. We have seen what dismal consequences flowed from the vain attempts of those who, in the last century, endeavoured to correct religious abuses by the light of nature, reason, and common sense. These should be taught to know their proper sphere, the affairs of human life, and to move cautiously within it ; it is not at all their province to amend what is wrong in the religious world. Errors and abuses will in this imperfect state of things be arising from time to time ; the *puritanical* age was not singular

in this respect; and even good men may, in a certain degree, be infected with these evils. The temptation is very strong in such cases to have recourse to *rational* expedients of correction; and the mind, before it is aware, contracts a secret, but powerful contempt of the simplicity of Gospel-faith, as if that had either brought on the evils, or was too weak to counteract them: But remember, that not the excess, but the defect of faith is ever the cause of a religious decline of all sorts and degrees. Apply yourselves to Jesus for the promised Spirit, do every thing in unreserved dependance on him; and if that course do not effectually sanctify your souls, then say *Christ is dead in vain, and your faith is also vain*. But it is not a merely systematical faith, to the efficacy of which such great things are to be ascribed; but to a cordial dependance on your Divine Saviour, cherished by constant prayer, and close walking with God in the way of his commandments.

Nor do I mean to discountenance the cultivation of the rational faculties. God forbid; they are his gift; and if the improvements of them be sanctified by grace, they answer many valuable purposes, which need not be here recounted:

counted : I only mean to exclude them from the province of dictating in religion. Christianity is from heaven, and is not understood, exercised, and practiced, but by a *spiritual understanding* *, far superior to that which is merely *rational*. Nor would I be understood to discountenance the study of the antient Classics and Philosophers by any thing I have said : only mean to exclude them wholly from the office of teaching religion. The study of them answers many important purposes ; while manly sense and good taste shall be at all respected among men, they will be esteemed as excellent models of both. But this is an age of dissipation and sloth ; and it surely adds not to our virtue, that the antients are held in such sovereign contempt. I wish the knowledge of them was more deep and more general among real Ministers of the Gospel than it is. St. Paul seems, by some Scripture-hints, to have made a profitable use of his human learning, as Moses before him no doubt converted the wisdom of Egypt, which he had studiously learned, to the service of the Church. The Reformers made a glorious use of their secular knowledge in the same way as St. Austin had done before them.

K k 2

And

* Coloss. i. 9.

And the really learned and excellent Dr. Owen in later times did the same.

It will be well if the fashionable, and even affected contempt of antient learning, which has infected even godly men, arise not in them more from sloth than from spirituality. Man was not made to be idle. Ministers of the Gospel should least of all be so. A lively and close attendance to every branch of duty, in connection with that best jewel of life, *inward communion with Jesus*, is not incompatible with some degree of secular study. Sure I am, that prayer and human learning are better companions than prayer and that sauntering, gossiping spirit, which so much disgraces the practice, devours the time, and vitiates the imagination of many, of some even good men, who have not from youth been habituated to close thinking. The Bible, and books written in the spirit of the Bible, must ever claim by far the principal part of the attention of studious men, who mean to glorify God by all their studies. Perhaps the learned antients deserve the next place; I am confident the *light reading* of modern pamphlets does not. We seem to embrace the maxim as true, *a great book is a great evil*. But
notwith-

notwithstanding the contrary current of the times, I am free to say, that if those who love reading employed themselves more in severer, more voluminous, and of course more antient authors, they would find their time and trouble to be better repaid. Were the antient Philosophers in particular more known among Ministers, they would be far better enabled to defend the truths of God against learned Infidelity, and to evince the importance of revelation than at present they are.

But a Christian owes various duties to society. To pray for our nation; to sigh before God for its abominations; to study to do all possible good to the souls and bodies of men; to demean himself as a loyal subject, and as a peaceable citizen, and even to return good for evil, these are his ornaments; thus it is that his light should shine before men. If he is ill treated on account of his faith and piety, patience and meekness are his arms. "God himself," as St. Cyprian sublimely observes in his excellent Treatise on Patience, "is not yet avenged for all the insults he has received from his creatures." His creatures should wait with him for the retribution of the last day. That, O Christian,

is

is thy day of triumph, reserve thyself for this, by *patient continuance in well-doing*; always maintaining thy interest in Jesus by faith, till the mystery of God shall be finished; then thy eternal day of rest shall commence, and *God shall wipe away all tears from thy eyes.*

F I N I S.



